



## Dealing with the Legacy of Conflict in Northern Ireland through Engagement and Dialogue

Lundy, P., Gilmartin, N., McDermott, P., Finegan, R., & Murphy, R. (Eds.) (2021). *Dealing with the Legacy of Conflict in Northern Ireland through Engagement and Dialogue*.

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

### Publication Status:

Published (in print/issue): 21/03/2021

### General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via Ulster University's Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

### Take down policy

The Research Portal is Ulster University's institutional repository that provides access to Ulster's research outputs. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact [pure-support@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:pure-support@ulster.ac.uk).

# DEALING WITH THE LEGACY OF CONFLICT IN NORTHERN IRELAND THROUGH ENGAGEMENT AND DIALOGUE



Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation in association with  
Irish Centre for Human Rights at NUI Galway and Ulster University.

This project has been supported by the  
EU PEACE IV Programme, managed by  
the Special EU Programmes Body.



  
**glencree**  
transforming violent conflict  
building peace

**Glencree Journal 2021**

# **Dealing with the Legacy of Conflict in Northern Ireland through Engagement and Dialogue**

Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation in association with Irish Centre for  
Human Rights at NUI Galway and Ulster University.

**ISBN: 978-1-903727-05-8**

March 2021

© 2021 – Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation  
The Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation  
Glencree, Co. Wicklow, A98 D635  
Republic of Ireland

The views and opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission or the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

The views and opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect those of the Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation. Reproduction of all or part of this document may be authorised only with written consent of the source.



A project supported by the European Union's PEACE IV Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

The Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation is a company limited by guarantee in the Republic of Ireland. Company No. 50088. Registered Charity No. CHY5943. Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA) No. 20009823.





## **The Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation**

Established in 1974 in response to the conflict in Northern Ireland, the Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation works with individuals and groups to transform conflict, promote reconciliation, encourage healthy relationships and build sustainable peace.

**Under the Patronage of the President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins.**

e: [info@glencree.ie](mailto:info@glencree.ie)

t: + 353 1 2829711

**Connect with us**    
**[www.glencree.ie](http://www.glencree.ie)**

## **Acknowledgments**

This Journal project was made possible by the European Union's Peace IV Programme Body, (SEUPB), without whose support the publication of this Journal would not have been possible.

Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation acknowledges and sincerely thanks the Editorial Team for this publication: Professor Ray Murphy of the Irish Centre for Human Rights at NUI Galway, Professor Patricia Lundy, Dr Niall Gilmartin and Dr Philip McDermott, all of Ulster University (UU) and Dr Rory Finegan, Maynooth University (MU) and formerly Assistant Manager (2020) of the Peace IV 'Addressing the Legacy of Violence through Facilitated Dialogue' Project at Glencree. Thank you is also extended to Dr Michelle Kearns and Roberta Cappieri of Glencree Centre for overseeing production of the Journal.

Glencree Centre further acknowledges the contribution of the nineteen authors of the articles in the Journal who work, record and research on these difficult issues every day. Finally, gratitude is owed to those who undertook the invisible but important task of peer reviewing and proof-reading each article.

## Table of Contents

<b>Loyalist Women Have A Voice – But Who’s Listening?</b> <i>Leanne Abernethy</i>	14
<b>Utilising Socially Engaged Photography As A Method For Exploring The Social Landscape Of Cultural Trauma In Northern Ireland</b> <i>Ashle Bailey-Gilreath</i>	23
<b>Pursuing The Common Good: An Ethical Framework For Promoting Reconciliation Within The Youth Sector In Northern Ireland / The North Of Ireland</b> <i>Cathy Bollaert</i>	35
<b>A Mnemonic Device For Belfast: Drawing The Ring Of Steel</b> <i>Kate Catterall</i>	46
<b>Facilitated Dialogue: The Political Theology Of Fr Alec Reid</b> <i>C. K. Martin Chung</i>	62
<b>The Bottom-Down Approach To Making Peace With The Past</b> <i>Geoffrey Corry</i>	77
<b>The Churches, Reconciliation And Addressing The Legacy Of Inter-Communal Violence In Northern Ireland</b> <i>Gladys Ganiel and Nicola Brady</i>	92
<b>Standing On Trial: <i>Convictions</i>, The Crumlin Road Courthouse And The Role Of Urban Development In Historical Sites Of Violence</b> <i>Sadie Gilker</i>	103
<b>Trauma, Denial And Acknowledgement: The Legacy Of Protestant Displacement In Londonderry/Derry During The Troubles</b> <i>Niall Gilmartin</i>	114
<b>‘Not So Much About Belfast, As Of Belfast’ Lessons For The Discourse Of Public History From The Approach Of Post- Conflict Belfast Poetry</b> <i>Samuel Guthrie</i>	126
<b>Lives, Landscapes And The Legacy Of The Past</b> <i>Cheryl Lawther &amp; Luke Moffett</i>	137
<b>Women’s Political Visualisation Of Post-Conflict Belfast: Community-Led Participatory Photography As A Means Of Highlighting Socio-Economic Issues Affecting Interface Areas Of The City</b> <i>Jolene Mairs Dyer</i>	149
<b>Addressing The Legacy Of Inter-Communal Violence Through Drama: Mainstream Theatre And Community Action</b> <i>Kevin De Ornellas &amp; Dónall Mac Cathmhaoill</i>	163

<b>Women In Peace Mediation On The Island Of Ireland: Towards A More Inclusive Definition</b>	<b>175</b>
<i>Heidi Riley &amp; Emma Murphy</i>	
<b>Victims, Survivors, And The Reconciliation Paradigm</b>	<b>186</b>
<i>Joseph S. Robinson</i>	
<b>Is It Always Going Be This Way?": Legacies Of The Troubles And The Holy Cross Girls Primary School Dispute</b>	<b>198</b>
<i>Eimear Rosato</i>	
<b>Embedding Memory Into The Landscape – A Place For Stolpersteine In Northern Ireland?</b>	<b>209</b>
<i>Stephen Roulston &amp; Sammy Taggart</i>	
<b>From Virtual Peace With Virtual Reality: Exploring The Contested Narratives Of Spaces And Places In Northern Ireland</b>	<b>221</b>
<i>Sammy Taggart, Stephen Roulston, Clare McAuley</i>	
<b>'Building' And 'Cultivating' Peace: Practitioner Reflections On The Sustainable Peace Network Project</b>	<b>238</b>
<i>Wilhelm Verwoerd</i>	
<b>Short Biographical Statements of Contributing Authors</b>	<b>249</b>

## Introduction

Twenty-three years after the signing of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, Northern Ireland and the border counties remain deeply divided along communal lines. An enduring aspect of this, is that the Agreement and other subsequent political efforts have yet to adequately address the legacy of past violence. This deficit is most acutely felt in the difficult, complex and divisive relationship between ‘victims and survivors’.

In 2017, the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation was awarded European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) funding under the PEACE IV Programme for the ‘Addressing the Legacy of Violence through Facilitated Dialogue Project’. This funding is for regional-level projects that result in meaningful, purposeful and sustained contact between persons from different communities.

Our project is focused around, victims’/survivors’ groups and their communities in Northern Ireland. It has, through a process of private and confidential facilitated dialogues, examined themes and issues which remain as obstacles to deeper understanding and the promotion of positive relations on this island.

This project’s goal is to deepen reconciliation across some of the most pronounced and persistent social and political divides still affecting our post-conflict space. Our focus is to promote positive and humanised cross-border and cross-community relations. Glencree holds a firm belief that facilitated dialogue can achieve some measure of reconciliation and peacebuilding to deal with these painful legacy issues.

One of the project aims is to create forums and platforms to share learning. As part of this process we embarked on a public call for papers based on practice, research, or methodologies that highlight the role of managed or ‘Facilitated Dialogues’ to address the ‘Legacy of Violence’ in our society.

This Journal details many different perspectives on how facilitated dialogue can be and has been used to address some of the most difficult legacy issues of our conflict.

We hope that the learning accrued through the project will be of assistance to other victims’/survivors’ groups, academics, policymakers, and practitioners in ascertaining how to productively engage with Northern Ireland’s contentious past. We also hope that the eclectic peer-reviewed research gathered in this publication will contribute beyond these shores for countries emerging out of violent conflict and highlight the issues of victims and survivors and their place as central to emerging peace processes.

***Róisín McGlone & Joan O’Flynn***  
***On behalf of Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation***



## Glencree staff biographical statements



### **Róisín McGlone**

Programme Manager of PEACE IV 'Addressing the Legacy of Violence through Facilitated Dialogue Project'

Born in Belfast, Roisin has been involved with conflict transformation programmes in Croatia, Macedonia, Guyana, America and South Africa. She was one of two Community Relations Nominees on the Civic Forum. She was an Assistant Boundary Commissioner for Belfast, an independent member of The Northern Ireland Policing Board, and a board member of the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council. Roisin graduated with a Masters in Philosophy in Reconciliation Studies with the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin.



### **Joan O'Flynn, Acting CEO**

Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation

Joan O'Flynn is Acting CEO during the maternity leave period of current CEO Naoimh McNamee. Joan has extensive experience of leadership and management roles as an independent consultant, across the voluntary and public sectors, and the civil service. Holding a Masters in Equality Studies from UCD and a BA from UCC, Joan's interests are poverty, social inclusion and equality; gender; community development and social policy more broadly. Joan's former roles have included CEO of the Camogie Association; National President of the Camogie Association; Director of the National Advisory Committee on Drugs (NACD), an independent committee under the auspices of the Minister with responsibility for the National Drugs Strategy based in the Department of Health; and, Head of Communications with the independent public sector body, the Combat Poverty Agency.



### **Naoimh McNamee, CEO**

Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation

Naoimh is an experienced senior manager and mediator (MCI Arb), with qualifications in International Relations (DCU) and international Security & Global Governance (Birkbeck). While working in London, Naoimh managed a variety of fundraising campaigns and social enterprises for the Charities Advisory Trust, in addition to her work on humanitarian aid projects in Belarus (Chernobyl Children's Project, Student's 10k Walk, Bike-2-Belarus). In the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (CI Arb – London), Naoimh implemented a large scale governance review and managed major projects for the organisation. Back in Ireland, she has held project roles in the Oireachtas, the Law Society of Ireland, the Dublin Dispute Resolution Centre, and Accenture. Naoimh brings a wealth of experience in change management, business process improvement and strategic human resources management, in both the private and public sectors.

## Editors' notes

The prolonged and often bloody conflict witnessed in Northern Ireland between 1969 and the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement (1998) has often been euphemistically referred to as the 'Troubles'. The 'Troubles' claimed the lives of some 3,700 people (McKittrick et al. 1999), injured many thousands more and today even at this remove leave a deep psychological scar on a society still trying to deal with the inherited intergenerational traumas of this period. Despite the unquestioned benefits of the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, Northern Ireland remains a divided society, with simmering tensions that have seen incidents of ongoing violence. These tensions are exacerbated within society in a post-Brexit scenario underpinned by constitutional uncertainty and changing demographics.

This bespoke Academic Journal produced by the Legacy of Violence Peace IV Project at Glencree in academic collaboration with The Irish Centre for Human Rights at NUI Galway and colleagues at Ulster University (UU) explores political, social, and cultural developments in contemporary Northern Ireland. In particular, the nineteen articles encompassed within this Journal emphasise 'Addressing the Legacy of Inter-Communal Violence through Facilitated Dialogue', which is the focus of the Peace IV Project. This is a key thematic debate encapsulated within the ongoing peace process as to how meaningful engagement, dialogue and perspective sharing with groups and individuals on the legacy of violence as a consequence of Northern Ireland's 'Troubles' may in turn contribute to both official and unofficial legacy processes.

The essays from the contributors represent a broad multi-disciplinary spectrum and are also from within the wider community of both academics and practitioners who are involved in fostering and developing inter-communal relationships and those that seek to address ongoing legacy issues of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The contributors themselves reflect the diversity and richness of the themes explored, with writers from not only the island of Ireland but as far afield as the United States and Hong Kong. The Editorial Board considers that this very diversity enhances the exploration of the key themes encapsulated within these pages. This includes the language, discourse and identity around the issue of dealing with the legacy of intercommunal violence, reconciliation, the obstacles to same and how it might be achieved. The role of geography is explored, whereby narrative and political memory is deeply embedded into the local landscape. Also explored and contextualised is the impact of gender and how women's groups contribute to possible reconciliation in a post-conflict environment. Yet another key theme is the experience of victims' and survivors' groups and how this can inform international audiences and other post-conflict environments in developing transitional justice models, which is again a key focus of the Legacy of Violence Peace IV Project.

The Editorial Board would like to extend our gratitude to the contributors who 'subjected' themselves to a prolonged and rigorous editorial process and the board hopes that these essays contribute cumulatively to a future predicated on peace and stability irrespective of political outcomes and developments.

***Rory Finegan,  
On behalf of editorial team.***

**Note to readers:**

The articles presented in this journal were first submitted in June 2020. All events referred to in the text were correct at the time of writing. Due to the time-lag between submission date and journal launch, some events referred to within the text may since have changed, and others impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Editors' biographical statements



**Patricia Lundy** is Professor of Sociology at University of Ulster, Northern Ireland. Her research interests are dealing with the legacy of political conflict, truth recovery, historical injustice and politics of memory. She has researched both community-based 'truth' recovery processes and official police-led historical conflict-related inquiries. Her in-depth study of the Police Service Northern Ireland's, Historical Enquiries Team achieved considerable media coverage and impact and changed the landscape in dealing with the past in NI. Her most recent project is an empirical study of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry (HIAI), from the perspective of victim/survivors. In 2016, she was awarded a Leverhulme Trust Major Research Fellowship and a British Academy Senior Research Fellowship in 2009. Her work has been published in a range of peer-reviewed journals including the International Journal of Transitional Justice, Sociology, Law and Society, Law and Social Challenges, Victims and Offenders and International Journal of Human Rights. She is committed to activist scholarship and ensuring that her work impacts positively on beneficiaries.



**Prof Ray Murphy** is on the faculty of the Irish Centre for Human Rights at NUI Galway. He was educated at NUI Galway, Trinity College Dublin, Kings Inns and the University of Nottingham (UK). He is also on the faculty of the International Institute for Criminal Investigations. He is a Commissioner with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and a former Vice Chair of the Executive Committee of Amnesty International (Ireland). He was the EU Fundamental Rights Agency Senior Expert for Ireland from 2014 to 2018.

He was a Visiting Scholar at the Centre for International Law, Al-Haq, Palestine in 2014. He was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship in 2006 and worked with Human Rights Watch in New York as a resident scholar. He is a former Captain in the Defence Forces and served with UN peacekeeping forces in the Middle East. He was Chairperson of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission from 1997 to 2000. He has field experience with the OSCE in Bosnia in 1996 and 1997.





**Dr Niall Gilmartin** is Lecturer in Sociology at Ulster University, Jordanstown. His research interests include conflict and peace studies; gender and armed conflict; forced displacement; transitional justice. He has published articles in several journals including *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *Capital & Class*, *International Journal of Transitional Justice* and *Irish Political Studies*. His book *Female Combatants After Armed Struggle: Lost In Transition?* was published by Routledge in 2019 as part of their Gender and Global Politics series. His forthcoming book *Northern Ireland: A Generation after the Good Friday Agreement*, co-authored with Colin Coulter, Katy Hayward and Peter Shirlow will be published in early 2021 by Manchester University Press.



**Dr Philip McDermott** is a senior lecturer in Sociology at Ulster University. His research interests lie in the areas of heritage and identity and how these are drawn on as resources by communities, particularly in post-conflict societies. Previous projects have included an AHRC-Funded initiative on Living Legacies of World War One from the perspectives of migrant communities living in Northern Ireland and a British Academy early career award on cultural diversity and Northern Ireland's heritage sector. Philip has published articles in journals such as *Ethnicities*, *Identities* and *Current Issues in Language Planning* and also acts as an editor for the *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* and the *Irish Journal of Sociology*. In 2015 he was a Charlemont scholar of the Royal Irish Academy.



**Dr Rory Finegan** is Assistant Professor in Military History & Strategic Studies at the Centre for Military History & Strategic Studies (CMHSS) in Maynooth University (MU), which includes delivery of the MA in Leadership Management & Defence Studies (MA LMDS) at the Irish Defence Forces Military College. He previously served as an officer in the Irish Defence Forces (DF), in a diversity of portfolios, that has included three separate tours of UN duty in the Middle East and a fourth in Kosovo. His tenure in the DF included being Head of Department at the United Nations Training School Ireland (UNTSI); where, as Course Director he delivered the bespoke International Human Rights Course. On leaving the DF he was Assistant Programme Manager of the Peace IV Legacy of Violence Project based at the Glenree Peace & Reconciliation Centre before taking up his current appointment with MU. He has lectured extensively in International Relations and Terrorism Studies.

# LOYALIST WOMEN HAVE A VOICE — BUT WHO'S LISTENING?

Leanne Abernethy



# LOYALIST WOMEN HAVE A VOICE – BUT WHO’S LISTENING?

## Abstract

The United Kingdom is on its 4th National Action Plan for Women, Peace & Security, while Ireland is currently delivering its 3rd National Action Plan (which references Northern Ireland). The year 2020 marks two decades of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace & Security, however, the CEDAW (Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) Committee’s Concluding Observations last year expressed concern that the UK Government has not implemented the principles of UNSCR 1325 in Northern Ireland. The women’s sector in Northern Ireland has worked with the Stormont All-Party Group on UNSCR 1325, but the new agreement ‘New Decade, New Approach’ (2020) fails to mention the word ‘women’. Notwithstanding this, there is a marked absence of voices of women in the North Antrim, Londonderry & East Tyrone areas about what they feel – about past, future and current issues, as well as their hopes and fears. This chapter will focus primarily on reflecting the voice of Loyalist/ Unionist women from towns and rural hinterlands. It recognises the value of women in the community and how, despite being a silent voice in the public realm, they play an important role in shaping narrative, understanding and perception. Any strategies concerning the application of the principles of UNSCR 1325 to Northern Ireland need to take account of their concerns, views and potential to influence future trends in loyalism and peacebuilding in Northern Ireland.

KEYWORDS: *women, loyalism, equality, Northern Ireland, peace building*

## Introduction

So, what does discussion of Women, Peace and Security mean for women in the housing estates and rural communities of North Antrim, Londonderry and East Tyrone? Very little, at present, as few are accustomed to expressing views in public about how they experienced conflict, and even fewer will have heard of UNSCR 1325. For many women from the P/U/L (Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist) community, ‘peace’ means not having to worry about whether family members arrive home safely, and ‘security’ means having enough money to settle the grocery bill. They do hold views about their place in society; their sense of identity; and their hopes for a society that offers a better future for their children, but these views are rarely given public voice.

The existence of the United Kingdom 4th National Action Plan for Women, Peace & Security or the Irish 3rd National Action Plan (which references Northern Ireland), means little. Similarly, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and

Security and CEDAW (Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women) is rarely known. Some may hear about the work of the Women's Sector in Northern Ireland working with the Stormont All-Party Group on UNSCR 1325, or realise that the new 'New Decade, New Approach' (2020) agreement failed to mention the word 'women'. For many women concerned about everyday perceptions of 'peace' and 'security' these debates seem a world away, whilst for P/U/L women there is a feeling that their sense of identity finds little room in such discussions.

Clayton states that 'however the 'concept of identity' has been formed it has 'peculiar' relevance where groups are in competition' (Clayton 1988, 8). The cohesion and importance of identity which acts as a social construct in contested geographical areas of the globe is particularly felt with the P/U/L community. This, Baker states becomes a hothouse as:

'Group consciousness or identity occurs when a group recognises itself as processing unique attributes that distinguish it from others... It assumes greater saliency when groups compete for scarce resources, power or other desired goods, but group awareness also emerges when groups perceive their valued attributes (for example culture, religion, language, identity) threatened by the actions of others, be that threat real or imagined' (Baker 1983, 10–11).

What can be conceived as external pressure from opposing cultures and groups forms an identity that is far less willing to compromise and builds structures of a defensive and martyred nature to justify its view of society.

### **What is loyalism and how can it be defined?**

McAuley states that it is a cultural social identity (2016, 78). This is a communal precept and as such, it brings individuals 'together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (ibid). He suggests five criteria as the building blocks of loyalist identity which include a strong sense of identity of what they are not and as expressing themselves in terms of social and political boundaries such as culture, language, religious bonds, economic, class and political interests, alongside memories and narratives drawn from shared communal experience.

Smithey (2011) takes up the theme of loyalist identity as it relates to the Protestant faith, the British Crown and Ulster/British identity, but focuses on the grassroots loyalist experience and the potential for shift in the manner in which identity is communicated. Shirlow and McEvoy (2008, 4) also highlight the experience of those P/U/L communities most affected by the 1969–1994 conflict, arguing that 'the construction and reproduction of identity remains embedded within notions of territoriality and ethnically defined allegiance,' which may suggest less potential movement than Smithey. Applying this to loyalism, they note how loyalists construct their role in the conflict as one of defence



of both their communities from Republican violence and defence of the constitutional union with Britain (Shirlow & McEvoy 2008, 3). However, in a later work, Shirlow (2012, 199) distinguishes between 'progressive' and 'regressive' Loyalism and decries commentators who unilaterally dismiss loyalism as inherently reactionary.

### **And where are the women?**

If loyalism is grounded in emotion and sentiment related to the community's sense of Britishness, and the need to defend this 'place-centred' value system (Shirlow 2012, 53), then the question as to the position of women within this community is pertinent. The reality is that women played major roles in the Ulster Defence Regiment, the RUC and in loyalist paramilitary organisations, but their experience and their voice has either been side-lined or silenced by an overly male lens that dominates. Susan McKay (2000) did interview some loyalist women in her study on Northern Protestants, but unfortunately in a manner that many feel was overly negative. McKay aside, Lehner observes that 'it is notable that the majority of literature on Northern Ireland and transitional justice mechanisms have remained remarkably gender-blind...' (Lehner 2011, 67). This tendency is even more pronounced when in the case of the role of loyalist women, a point noted by Ward in her study 'Unionism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland: From Tea-Makers to Political Action' (Ward 2006).

There has been a growth in academic studies on gender, conflict and peacebuilding. Ashe applied a gender lens to the 'ethno-national' conflict in Northern Ireland in 2008 (Ashe 2008), building on the idea that the experience of war/violent conflict is gendered as evidenced by the disparity of treatment of men and women, with women being trivialised as a direct consequence of the accentuated masculinities attached to war. This point was further elaborated by Sjoberg (Sjoberg, NNN) in a global context, and by Ashe and Harland (2013) as applied to Northern Ireland, where the dominance of conflict-related 'troubling masculinities' augmented a more conservative understanding of gender identities. Ashe builds on this perspective in 2019 (Ashe 2019) by suggesting that the new institutions inaugurated under the Belfast Agreement (1998) actually preserve these older conservative narratives. In short, that 'ethno-nationalist' antagonism reinforces the male role as the protectors and defenders of specific 'ethno-national' societal/communal groups.

Despite the Belfast Agreement promising 'the right of women to full and equal political participation', subsequent political culture and arrangements have failed to deliver on this. Hayes and McAllister (2012) and Deiana (2013) both trace how the consocietal political arrangements adopted failed to enhance the voice or representation of women in politics, a point that Potter (2014) and Gilligan (2014) underlined in evidence for the Northern Ireland Assembly. Focusing on the political representation of women, Gilligan drew attention to five barriers – cash (access to); culture (political); care (responsibilities); confidence and candidate selection. McDowell introduces an additional dimension in

that the political culture and institutions 'privileged male interpretations of the past (and, therefore, present)' (2008, 65).

A number of studies have been written on women in the Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities in Northern Ireland (Aretxaga 1997) and in recent years there has been some attention given to the voice of unionist and loyalist women (Racioppi and O'Sullivan 2000; Ward 2006; McEvoy 2009), however such studies as are available predominantly focus on Belfast, and in some cases, on loyalist women paramilitaries. The limited interest in women's roles in the broader P/U/L tradition is arguably both historic as well as contemporary. Hill (2013) has recorded the high level of female engagement during the time of the Ulster Covenant (1912) – an involvement, that like the current period, has gone largely unrecognised.

This undervaluing of the role of Loyalist/Unionist women is not just a historical discrepancy, it is a contemporised reality for many loyalist women, especially those living outside the main urban areas. This reality is evident in the interviews conducted for this paper. Out of the eight interviews, not one expresses satisfaction with the current peace process. In fact, many feel marginalised and disconnected with a process that a number believe is largely Belfast based and disinterested in their views.

### **A scan of what loyalist women think in rural north Antrim**

The interviews conducted as a pilot exercise given the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic were open-ended, but focused largely on experience of the conflict; attitudes to the peace process; and tentative hopes for the future:

'Peace process, it wasn't a ceasefire, was in name only.'

'Ceasefire was a laugh because it wasn't a ceasefire. It was stage-managed and the IRA had a ceasefire but their people moved into groups and carried on. The peace process was an appeasement for the other side.'

'Didn't agree with GFA and still doesn't, giving in to Sinn Féin/IRA.'

'The GFA was meant to be a big thing but it was just another selling of unionism and handing our souls to the devil.'

(Author's interviews 2020)

Such sentiments are not unusual in conversations in rural areas and in the circles that loyalist women move in. There is a strong sense that they have been left behind in a process that privileges the interests of Nationalists/Republicans. One interviewee states that: 'things haven't changed and we are giving in to Sinn Féin; power-sharing isn't working, it's pandering to Sinn Féin' (interviewee 3. 2020). This sense of erosion of their

position and lack of recognition of what they suffered during the conflict, is expressed by interviewee 1 who states that the 'unionist community lost too much because they (IRA), they're now getting their own way with shirts and ties on rather than bombs and bullets'. This opinion resonated in various forms amongst all the interviewees. This is concerning, as over two decades after the Belfast Agreement women feel little, or no, confidence in the peace process that was designed to deliver a new dispensation in Northern Ireland.

The importance of this finding is underlined because these feelings have now entered the psych of rural loyalist women's narrative. This is a narrative that has the potential to become intergenerational in impact, with destabilising influences on peacebuilding and the peace process. Interviewees 4 and 7 expressed dissatisfaction. Interviewee 4 says she 'doesn't think the peace process did what it should have done' and interviewee 7 states 'the peace process hasn't made life any better at all'. Interviewee 6 was despondent, asserting that 'things haven't changed and we are giving in to Sinn Féin; power-sharing isn't working, it's pandering to Sinn Féin'. Overall, the general perception of this group of loyalist women, in the three rural areas, was of a one-sided process that only favoured and facilitated nationalism and republicans.

While it is now evident that the Troubles has had a long-term detrimental effect on the psychological wellbeing of those who experienced it (Muldoon 2004, 456), such impacts are not just personal, they become integral to a community experience when not recognised and addressed. This, in turn, can give rise to inter-generational impacts. Alongside having to come to terms with the legacy of the conflict, what emerged from the interviews was a class dimension, encapsulated in the belief that middle-class concerns about economics was a major factor in Unionist acceptance of a process that would eventually destroy the Unionist/loyalist culture of the women interviewed.

Those interviewed opined that while they could not openly be proud of their P/U/L without it impacting on them, then peace for them or their children was not a reality. Cultural expression was something that they wanted to be proud of but was curtailed by fear of job loss, intimidation, and exclusion. For society to progress, in a peaceful and secure fashion, these fears and the negative consequences of them expressing their identity would have to be confronted.

The women interviewed made a clear distinction between loyalism and unionism. The loyalist women show some contempt for those who they identify as being in a higher economic bracket, who they blame for undermining unionism. Interviewee 2 states '*middle-class unionism doesn't see this*' (the undermining of the union) 'and don't want to side with grassroots loyalism, this is the downfall of unionism.' Interviewee 1 says that 'garden centre types are only worried about money, it's just cash before the sash.' As an extension of this, the women show a distinct lack of trust in politicians generally which leads them to question the democratic process. They indicate that they feel part of an

underclass, underlined by expressions of distrust of social and community structures. 'We have nothing' is a common refrain. There is a sense that they are outsiders, marginalised and dispossessed.

When asked what is needed within their community the interviewees responded:

Interviewee 2 – 'Would love a woman's programme where issues are discussed throughout and could be continued as groups like that don't exist for women'.

Interviewee 5 – 'We need a women's programmes but not ones that are set up to run down men, one to better yourself as a woman and talk about things like the discussions during this'.

Interviewee 7 – 'Would get involved in a woman's group if it was different from those already there, they are too middle class and clique'.

These women feel let down by a process that they see as both overly middle-class and urban. They feel the need for community-based women's groups within which they have the space to express their views and to reflect collectively, as a precursor to a public voice.

## Conclusion

This initial research has shown that despite the fact that loyalist women may not currently have a public voice, their influence within family and community is still considerable, and their relationship to both past and future is pivotal in the creation of a narrative about the peace process, peacebuilding and democracy more generally. The failure to ensure that this voice becomes public, and thereby possible to engage with, runs the risk of contributing to further distrust and marginalisation. While the views of these loyalist women may not always be comfortable, or indeed welcome, it is important that they are heard so that they will build the confidence to engage on a broader basis. The current context of ethno-nationalist masculinity that has largely framed both the Troubles and the peace process cannot be allowed to continue to minimise women's voices from whatever 'side' of the community in Northern Ireland. But any such new space to negotiate gender and identities must include the voices of loyalist women from outside Belfast to, hopefully, counter the current mutually exclusive narratives of the peace process.



## References

- Ashe, F. 2008. 'Gendering Ethno-Nationalist Conflict in Northern Ireland'. In *Northern Ireland Politics after Peace*, edited by C. Coulter. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Ashe, F. and K. Harland. 2014. 'Troubling Masculinities: Changing Patterns of Violent Masculinities in a Society Emerging from Political Conflict'. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 37(9).
- Ashe, F. 2019. *Gender, Nationalism and Conflict Transformation*. Routledge Press.
- Baker, D. G. 1983. *Race, Ethnicity and Power: A Comparative Study*. Routledge Press.
- Buckley, S. and P. Lonergan. 1983. 'Women and the Troubles, 1969–1980'. In *Terrorism in Ireland*, edited by Y. Alexander and A. O'Day. London: Croom Helm.
- Clayton, P. 1996. *Enemies and Passing Friends: Settler Ideologies in Twentieth Century Ulster*. London: Pluto Press.
- Connolly, Paul. 2003. 'Ethical Principles for Researching Vulnerable Groups.' <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/victims/docs/connolly03.pdf>
- Deiana, M. 2013. 'Women's Citizenship in Northern Ireland after the 1998 Agreement'. *Irish Political Studies* 28(3): 399–412.
- Gilligan, Y. 2014. 'Women in Politics: Report by Centre for Women & Democracy'. Queens University Belfast. ([http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/reports/assem\\_exec\\_review/women-in-politics.pdf/](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/reports/assem_exec_review/women-in-politics.pdf/))
- Gray, John, 2013. 'Mary Ann McCracken, pioneer feminist and revolutionary'. WRDA Lectures. <https://vimeo.com/61110291>
- Hayes, B. and I. McAlister. 2012. 'Gender and Consocietal Power Sharing in Northern Ireland'. *International Political Science Review* 34(2): 123–139.
- Horgan, Goretti. 2005. 'What does the Stormont House Agreement mean for women in Northern Ireland?' Open Democracy. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/what-does-stormont-house-agreement-mean-for-women-in-northern-ireland/>
- Lehner, S. 2011. *Post-Conflict Masculinities: Filiative Reconciliation in Five Minutes of Heaven and David Park's The Truth Commissioner*. In *Irish Masculinities: Critical Reflections on Literature and Culture*, edited by C. Magennis and R. Mullen, 65–76. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.

## References

McAuley, J. 2016. *Very British Rebels?* London: Bloomsbury.

McEvoy, S. 2009. 'Loyalist Women Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland: Beginning a Feminist Conversation about Conflict Resolution.' *Security Studies* 18(2): 262–286.

McDowell, S. 2008. 'Commemorating Dead "Men": Gendering the Past and Present in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland.' *Gender, Place and Culture* 15(4): 335.

Mckay, S. 2000. *Northern Protestants: An Unsettled People*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press.

Muldoon, O. 2004. 'Children of the Troubles: The Impact of Political Violence in Northern Ireland.' *Journal of Social Issues* 60: 453–468. 10.1111/j.0022-4537.2004.00366.x.

UN Security Council. 2000. Resolution 1325. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%20SRES1325%20.pdf>

Potter, M. 2014, 'Who Runs Northern Ireland? A Summary of Statistics Relating to Gender and Power.' Northern Ireland Assembly, Belfast. [http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2014/assembly\\_exec\\_review/7914.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2014/assembly_exec_review/7914.pdf)

Rodriguez, J. and Fortier, T. 2007. *Cultural memory: Resistance, faith, and identity*. <https://www.yushanth.org.tw/templates/cache/26459/images/562cdb641680e.pdf>

Shirlow, P. and K. McEvoy. 2008. *Beyond the Wire: Former Prisoners and Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland*. London: Pluto Press.

Shirlow, P. 2012. *The End of Ulster Loyalism?* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Sjoberg, L. 2013. *Gendering Global Conflict*. New York: Columbia University Press.

# UTILISING SOCIALLY ENGAGED PHOTOGRAPHY AS A METHOD FOR EXPLORING THE SOCIAL LANDSCAPE OF CULTURAL TRAUMA IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Ashle Bailey-Gilreath



# UTILISING SOCIALLY ENGAGED PHOTOGRAPHY AS A METHOD FOR EXPLORING THE SOCIAL LANDSCAPE OF CULTURAL TRAUMA IN NORTHERN IRELAND

## Abstract

A growing body of research suggests that the residual effects of the conflict in Northern Ireland have contributed to the cultural trauma of its residents, from those who directly experienced the Troubles, to their children. But what does cultural trauma look like? How has the chronic and enduring underlying fear affecting multiple generations changed the dynamics of families, communities, and the overall culture in Northern Ireland? One way to highlight and investigate the legacy of the Troubles in a meaningful and impactful way is through socially engaged photography. This novel approach can create an accessible and engaging way to involve individuals and communities currently plagued by these issues. This process allows for active engagement, allowing the public to play an integral and collective role in the narrative and process of healing. This is especially important in Northern Ireland, where many of the residents have expressed research fatigue from continuously participating in studies but not feeling as if their voice and concerns are being heard.

**KEYWORDS:** *socially engaged photography, cultural trauma, Northern Ireland*

## Introduction

Over 20 years has passed since the signing of the Good Friday Peace Agreement, which has been viewed by many<sup>1</sup> as symbolically ending the civil conflict known as the 'Troubles' (Aughey 2005). Starting in the 1970s, this period of violence resulted in thousands of deaths and injuries, as well as countless others suffering psychological damage from the conflict.

These experiences of widespread trauma permeate all aspects of society, even affecting those who did not experience the conflict directly. Even with a significant decrease in violence since 1998, many important issues and residual effects of the conflict remain unresolved. For example, data reveal an increase in the diagnosis of conflict-related trauma since the signing of the Peace Agreement (Gilligan 2006), most notably in communities where there were higher instances of violence during the Troubles (DHSSPS 2006). In fact, 39% of the Northern Irish population has reported

---

1. Of note is the 1994 ceasefire agreement between paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland which played an important role in ending the conflict.

experiencing a conflict-related trauma, resulting in Northern Ireland having the highest reported rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in the world (Bunting et al. 2013).

These staggering statistics provide some evidence of the lingering effects conflict can have on multiple generations, but how does trauma affect an entire culture? This type of transmitted trauma, that not only affects those who witness conflict first-hand but also impacts a culture's shared psychology, has been referred to as 'cultural trauma'. Cultural trauma 'occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways (Alexander 2012, 6). This shared experience becomes part of the narrative a community weaves together about its culture and the world (Volkan 2001). Cultural traumas are similar to other cultural phenomena, wherein they 'persist and continue for much longer than other traumas, frequently even crossing generational boundaries' (Gailiené 2019, 3; Sztompka 2000). Indeed, research has found that children of individuals who experienced cultural trauma are inheriting more than just their physical characteristics, they're absorbing their parents' fears about a past world of danger. The transmission of cultural trauma and memory can be inadvertently passed down through ritual, practices, and symbols. For example, in Northern Irish culture this can be seen by way of parades, flags, peace walls, murals, and bonfires. This memory transmission of important cultural events and the 'cultural narrative about what is being transmitted profoundly shapes the nature of the experience of offspring of trauma survivors' (Lehrner and Yehuda 2018, 14; Mohatt, Thompson, Thai and Tebes 2014).

It is evident from prior research that the conflict in Northern Ireland has contributed to the cultural trauma of its residents, from those who directly experienced the Troubles to their children. But what does cultural trauma look like? How has the enduring experience of trauma changed the dynamics of families, communities, and the overall culture in Northern Ireland? One way to highlight and investigate these questions in a meaningful way is through the use of socially engaged photography. This approach facilitates and supports engagement and open dialogue, allowing communities to play an integral role in the meaning and narrative surrounding such shared trauma.

### **Socially engaged photography**

The concept of socially engaged photography emerged from the community photography movement that took place during the 1970s throughout the United Kingdom. Spearheaded by grassroots organisations, activist groups, and photography collectives, the movement's goal was to democratise the arts by providing spaces and opportunities for the general public to access and learn new skills, as well as provide platforms and outlets where their perspectives could be visualised (Luvera 2019, 5). The community photography movement was 'a way of opening up photography

and empowering marginalised groups to take the lead in making photographic representations of their own lives and experiences' (Connell 2019, 35). The ultimate goal was for this type of photography to become a way for people to 'look at the world differently' and to challenge the norms and potential exploitation sometimes seen in photojournalism and documentary photography (Spence 1976, 1). Ultimately, it allowed for the people who traditionally would be the subject of photographs the opportunity to control the narrative and tell their story, with the hope that it would create positive social change.

Similarly, *socially engaged photography* facilitates 'a sense of community by engaging people in the process of taking photographs, describing the significance of what is captured, and co-creating a shared narrative about [the] situation that leads to positive individual and collective actions' (Bratchford, Giotaki, and Wewiora 2018, 83). Artists and photographers who pursue socially engaged practices often wish to effect change, highlight systemic issues, and in some ways promote activism.

While the methodologies used by such photographers are varied, there are common threads found with visual research methods used in sociological and anthropological research. However, the most important aspect of socially engaged photographic practice, and that which sets it apart, is the role that the 'participant' plays in the work. Socially engaged photography balances the relationship between the process and the output, as well as the community with the image production. As a result, the authorship of the images is shared between the photographer and the subject(s). The participatory process of creating the images is as important as the final work. These additional methods provide the participants an outlet that allows their voice and personal experiences to be heard, in addition to being seen.

It is important to briefly examine the concept of participation in order to fully define how participants interact with, and engage in, such practice-based research. While there are a number of positions taken on defining exactly what is participation, research has identified 'three core elements of participation: cognitive, to generate different understandings of a particular reality; political, to empower the voiceless; and instrumental, to propose new alternatives' (Taylor 2014, 22; Rahnema 1992, 121). Participation can range in its 'levels of empowerment', which can cause the act of participation to vary from empty ritual to real power that affects change (Arnstein 1969). Additionally, participatory acts can range from active to passive. Active participation can be understood as falling into one of four typologies: *full empowerment*, where the participant plays the central role of decision-maker; *collaboration*, wherein the direct participation takes place during the implementation stage of the project; a lesser active role in which the participant *provides information*; and *incidental expression*, wherein the participation is limited to proving impact statements (Taylor 2004). Indirect participation is present in two forms, a passive form of *collaboration* in which each individual is not represented fully, but rather through a 'central voice' and *notification*, or



the process of informing individuals through developed discourse.

Below, I discuss two case studies of socially engaged photographic works that attempt to bring attention to two issues through different levels of participation: the first being the cultural trauma experienced by the Kurdish people during their displacement in the 1980–1990s, and the second surrounds the systemic issues of homelessness in the United Kingdom. When attempting to address complex issues such as these, it is necessary to consider a method that goes beyond a single application or workshop. As with other applied arts projects, successful socially engaged photography should be ‘grounded in a commitment to listen to communities and enable community-driven change; and is linked to conceptual frameworks with long-term perspectives on participatory methods, social change and the role of the arts within those processes’ (Faurey 2018, 5). The examples below provide unique but equally effective case studies that support this.

## Case studies

### ***Susan Mieselas – Kurdistan***

Susan Mieselas’s photographic work on Kurdistan originally began as a mission of traditionally documentary photography. This changed after she witnessed the ‘exhumation of mass graves in northern Iraq, the result of Saddam Hussein’s genocidal campaign against the Kurds in 1987 and 1988’ (CCP 2012). Realising the magnitude of this cultural trauma, she ‘began to gather every scrap of visual evidence – documents, family pictures, maps, personal stories – to build a public archive of the history of the displaced Kurdish people’ (ibid)<sup>2</sup> (see Figure 1). Mieselas became drawn to the narrative and complexities behind the individuals and events that had been so publicised through the media and documentary photography. With this in mind, she tasked herself with gathering the collective memory of the Kurdish people stating, ‘What I wanted to do was look at a photograph not as an object, but as something we could re-embed in the history of a people, expanded and anchored by others’.

Clayton states that: ‘however’ the ‘concept of identity’ has been formed, it has ‘peculiar documents around it’ (East 2019). To do this, she worked closely with families from the Kurdish diaspora, adding family photos, documents, and memories in order to tell their stories. Eventually, Mieselas found herself not taking photographs anymore but spending the majority of her time meeting and speaking with families and documenting the items they provided her. In this respect her voice and agency as the ‘photographer’ receded, allowing the voices and stories of the Kurdish people to take centre stage. The exhibitions, website, and book dedicated to the project provide painstaking documentation of the ‘history of a people who don’t have a homeland and have no national archive’ (East 2019). This body of work, which is still evolving, has been

---

2. Mieselas, Susan. Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History. c. 1997. Susan Mieselas website, accessed 2 June 2020, [https://www.susanmieselas.com/archive-projects/kurdistan/#id=book\\_site](https://www.susanmieselas.com/archive-projects/kurdistan/#id=book_site)

exhibited widely throughout Europe<sup>3</sup> (see Figure 2). At each of the exhibitions Meiselas invited displaced Kurds to bring with them memories and items they would like to share, incorporating them in the show.

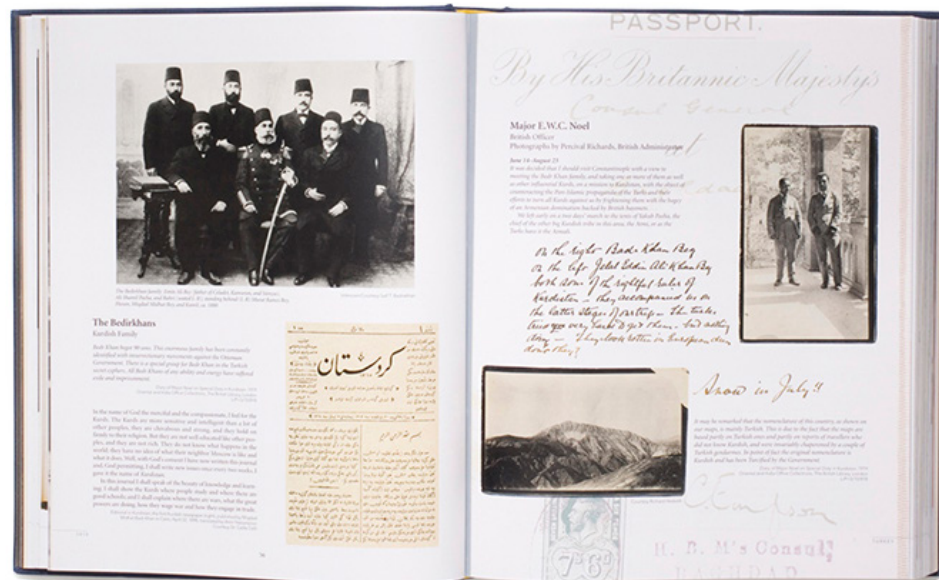


Figure 1. Excerpt from the book form of Susan Meiselas's Kurdistan project, titled 'Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History'.



Figure 2. (From Left) aka KURDISTAN installation. Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Vienna. 2015; aka KURDISTAN exhibition storymap detail. The Photographers' Gallery. 2019.

3. Meiselas, Susan. AkaKURDISTAN. *British Journal of Photography*, accessed 2 June 2020, <https://www.bjp-online.com/2019/05/susan-meiselas-a-space-for-collaboration/>

The communities that participated felt that they were an intricate part of the storytelling process. This was particularly meaningful to the individuals who contributed their artefacts to the story, especially after living in exile and being displaced from their homeland. In this respect, Meiselas' methods were particularly effective in communicating the symbolic and emotional aspects of this community's experiences, more so than traditional documentation would have captured. This is especially important when communicating such trauma to an outside audience, as 'most official histories are only one perspective, they often don't include the daily lives of those most impacted by dramatic events. We need to hear those voices' (Abel-Hirsch 2019). Meiselas has made it her mission to not only document this tragedy, but to ensure their stories are heard, and to create a wider dialogue around the events with the outside world. At each of the exhibitions, Meiselas organises a multi-day workshop for the local Kurdish community, working closely with participants to incorporate their memories into booklets that they make during the workshop. These booklets are then added to the maps in the exhibition by the participants. This creates a collaborative process in the design and implementation of some aspects of the project as well as allowing members of a once displaced community to come together and participate in a true social activity. The project is still ongoing as Meiselas works with Kurdish people throughout the world to continue gathering the visual history of their stories, experiences, and desire for a homeland.

### **Anthony Luvera – Taking Place**

Anthony Luvera is another socially engaged photographer who sought to shed light on a marginalised and displaced community: that of the homeless in England. In *Taking Place*, Luvera 'uncovers the shocking and poignant challenge faced by those experiencing homelessness and asks audiences to consider the narratives and dimensions that can be shared through a collaborative approach to different creative mediums, radically refocusing centres of power' (Luvera 2020). Since 2013, Luvera has worked collaboratively with homeless individuals to give them the tools of photography and sound recording to document their experiences. They meet together regularly throughout this collaboration in order to talk about the work the individuals have created, as well as their personal experiences. Luvera also co-creates self-portraits with these individuals by teaching them how to use a medium-format camera over multiple sessions. The self-portrait locations are chosen by each of the participants who also take their own photograph by using a shutter release cable<sup>4</sup> (see Figure 3). Luvera not only gives the 'subject' the skills they need to take the images, but also the ability to choose how to narrate and represent their experiences and facilitates open dialogue about the issues they face. These are important examples of the power shift that occurs in socially engaged photography.

---

4. Luvera, Anthony. 'Taking Place' c. 2019, The Gallery at Foyles, accessed 2 June 2020  
<https://www.galleryatfoyles.com/taking-place>



*Figure 3. Anthony Luvera (right) working with an individual on their self-portrait.*

Additionally, policy and legislation on these topics is ‘an important aspect of the research underpinning Luvera’s practice with homeless individuals’ (Luvera 2014). In collaboration with one of his participants, Gerald Mclaverty, Luvera highlights the true scale of the homelessness crisis by exhibiting a qualitative inquiry<sup>5</sup> through correspondence with ‘110 local authorities across the UK on the services available for people experiencing homelessness’ (Luvera 2020) (see Figure 4). While many could not provide basic replies to questions such as ‘Where can I go for something to eat?’ or ‘Where can I find shelter when it is raining or snowing?’, 41 of the councils did not reply at all. This is disheartening on many levels, but especially given the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act, which legally requires councils to actively address some of the questions raised in their letters. Luvera’s work shows the intricate and long-standing relationship that takes place between the photographer and the community they work with, as well as highlighting the importance of the narrative and dialogue that is created not only within the community, but with the general public through exhibitions, public awareness, activism campaigns, and open discussion. Through this work Luvera has created a platform for raising awareness on the issue of homelessness and has given a face and voice to the statistics.

5. Luvera, Anthony, and Gerald Mclaverty. ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ 2017, Photopedagogy, accessed June 2, 2020 <https://www.photopedagogy.com/representing-homelessness.html>





*Figure 4. From left: Frequently Asked Questions, Wall installation, Tate Liverpool, 2018; Gerald McLaverty presenting Frequently Asked Questions at State of the Nation, Museum of Homelessness, Tate Modern, 2017; Luvera and McLaverty presenting at Houses of Parliament, 2019.*

### **Northern Ireland context**

The expansive research on Northern Ireland and the community level work that has been carried out to address the legacy of the Troubles is undeniably important. And whilst there are many different and effective ways to address these issues, I propose that socially engaged photography may be used as a complementary method by providing a humancentred and collaborative approach to discussing cultural trauma. Socially engaged photographic projects can create an accessible and engaging way to involve individuals and communities in open dialogue about the legacy of the Troubles. This process allows for active engagement, allowing the public to play an integral and collective role in the meaning making and narrative surrounding such issues. This is especially important in Northern Ireland, where many of the residents feel exploited by past research in their communities, continuously participating in studies but not feeling as if their voice and concerns are being heard.

The emphasis socially engaged photography places on the role of the participant is important in order to give a face, voice, and a personalised narrative to the myriad effects cultural trauma is having on communities in Northern Ireland. Such a project could help facilitate meaningful interaction and dialogue with all sides of the conflict, allowing residents of different communities to better understand each other. For example, socially engaged projects could allow residents of different communities to not only learn more about each other, but also share the social and emotional effects of the Troubles they are still grappling with. Additionally, this may reveal that they face similar issues and have more in common than not. Participants from all communities would work together in deciding how the project is structured, how it is disseminated, and how it would directly benefit their communities. This process gives them a voice and prominent role that traditional research typically does not allow for. Of course, there are ethical and methodological issues that need to be carefully addressed when carrying out such a project, especially in a divided society such as Northern Ireland. While socially engaged projects offer a number of important contributions to addressing legacy issues, there are still significant limitations that should be recognised when developing such initiatives. The nature and limitations of participation should be carefully considered, and particular attention should be paid to partiality, representation, understanding the meaning of 'truth' and 'memory' and how this translates to different communities, the risk of re-traumatisation, and the conscientious role 'participants' play in the decision-making process.

Socially engaged photography offers an outlet that supports and complements traditional qualitative inquiry by providing different perspectives and approaches. It can provide a platform for raising awareness or generating dialogue and questions around important and complex issues, oftentimes more so than traditional qualitative methods in specific circumstances. It also allows individuals to share the emotional and symbolic aspects of their experiences that may not be accessed through verbal or written responses. Socially engaged photography addresses power dynamics often seen in research on social issues and in conventional documentary photography. By providing an opportunity for the participant to be in a collaborative and equal position with the photographer, it allows them to reflect on the issue in a more meaningful way. The underpinnings of socially engaged photographic projects provide a rich platform for healing from cultural trauma and creating a space for open dialogue and engagement, as well as 'imagin[ing] new social forms, new power dynamics, [and] new social relationships on individual and institutional levels' (Gregory 2014, 3).



## References

- Abel-Hirsch, Hannah. 2019. Susan Meiselas: 'A space for collaboration'. British Journal of Photography, May 15. <https://www.bjp-online.com/2019/05/susan-meiselas-a-spacefor-collaboration/>
- Alexander, Jeffery C., Ron Eyerman, Bernard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, and Piotr Sztompka. 2004. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. University of California Press.
- Arnstein, Serry R. 1969. 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation'. Journal of the American Planning Association 35(4): 216–224.
- Aughey, Arthur. 2005. *The Politics of Northern Ireland: Beyond the Belfast Agreement*. Routledge.
- Bratchford, Gary, Gina Giotaki, and Liz Wewiora. 2018. 'Socially engaged photography and wellbeing: reflections on a case study in the northwest of England'. London Journal of Primary Care 10(4): 82–88.
- Bunting, Brendan P., Fiona R. Ferry, Samuel D. Murphy, Siobhan M. O'Neill, and David Bolton. 2013. *Trauma associated with civil conflict and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: evidence from the Northern Ireland study of health and stress*. Journal of Traumatic Stress 26: 134–141.
- Center for Creative Photography (CCP). 2012. Susan Meiselas: *From the Field to the Archive – Nicaragua to Kurdistan*. Center for Creative Photography University of Arizona, October 25. <https://ccp.arizona.edu/exhibitions-events/events/susan-meiselas-fieldarchive-nicaragua-kurdistan>
- Department of Health, Social Services and Personal Safety (DHSSPS). 2006. *Protect Life. A Shared Vision: the Northern Ireland Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan 2006–2011*. Belfast, Northern Ireland.
- East, Ben. 2019. 'Susan Meiselas's three decades long journey photographing the Kurds.' The National, 26 March. <https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/art/susanmeiselas-s-three-decades-long-journey-photographing-the-kurds-1.841449>
- Fairey, Tiffany. 2018. 'Participatory Arts and Peace-Building: Embodying and Challenging Reconciliation'. In *Participatory Arts for Invisible Communities: PAIC* edited by Irena Sertić, 204–14. Omnimedia.
- Gailienè, Dauntè. 2019. 'When culture fails: coping with cultural trauma'. *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 64(4): 530– 547.

## References

- Gilligan, Chris. 2006. 'Traumatised by Peace? A Critique of Five Assumptions in the theory and practice of conflict-related trauma in Northern Ireland'. *Policy & Politics*
- Gregory, Eliza. 2014. 'Photo-based Social Practice: A discussion of socially engaged, transdisciplinary, and expanded practices in contemporary photography'. A Social Practice, May 15. <https://www.asocialpractice.com/photo-based-social-practicebroadsheet/>
- Lehrner, Amy, and Rachel Yehuda. 2018. 'Cultural trauma and epigenetic inheritance'. *Development and Psychopathology* 30(5): 1–15.
- Luvera, Anthony. 2014. Assembly, Brighton Photo Fringe, Phoenix Brighton. Anthony Luvera, October 4. <http://www.luvera.com/assembly>
- Luvera, Anthony. 2019. "Photography for Whom"? Photography for Whom 1
- Luvera, Anthony. 2020. Taking Place. Anthony Luvera, January 11. <http://www.luvera.com/taking-place>
- Mohatt, Nathaniel Vincent, B. Azure, Thompson, Nghi D. Thai, and Jacob Kraemer Tebes. 2014. 'Historical trauma as public narrative: A conceptual review of how history impacts present-day health'. *Soc. Sci. Med.* 106: 128–136.
- Rahnema, Majid. 1992. 'Poverty'. In *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, edited by W. Sachs.
- Sztompka, Piotr. 2000. 'Cultural Trauma: The Other Face of Social Change'. *European Journal of Social Theory* 3(4): 449–66.
- Taylor, David. 2014. *Victim Participation in Transitional Justice Mechanisms: Real Power or Empty Ritual?* Impunity Watch.
- Volkan, Vamik D. 2001. 'Transgenerational Transmissions and Chosen Traumas: An Aspect of Large-Group Identity'. *Group Analysis* 34: 79–97.

# **PURSUING THE COMMON GOOD: AN ETHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTING RECONCILIATION WITHIN THE YOUTH SECTOR IN NORTHERN IRELAND / THE NORTH OF IRELAND**

Cathy Bollaert



# PURSUING THE COMMON GOOD: AN ETHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTING RECONCILIATION WITHIN THE YOUTH SECTOR IN NORTHERN IRELAND / THE NORTH OF IRELAND

## Abstract

Envisioning a future to which all can aspire is integral to building a peaceful and thriving society. However, with the current Brexit negotiations taking place, society is standing at a crossroad of an uncertain future. This has the potential to negatively impact on building the confidence of young people to deal with the legacy of the past and build their view and hope for the future. As Northern Ireland/the North of Ireland continues to deal with the legacy of the Troubles, and in the interests of building a shared and peaceful future in which all the members of the society can flourish, there is a need to keep a spotlight on reconciliation within the youth work sector and explore the question of where to next for reconciliation within the youth work sector. Using the common good as an ethical framework, this paper draws on the voice of young people to set an agenda for reconciliation in youth work practice.

## KEY WORDS:

*Common good, reconciliation, youth work, Northern Ireland/north of Ireland*

## Introduction

Envisioning a future based on the common good to which all can aspire is integral to building a peaceful and thriving society (Lederach 1998; Jaede 2017). This is well illustrated in South Africa, where a vision of the 'Rainbow Nation' not only played a significant role in shaping the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but it also worked to unite the nation and inspire hope in the future at the time of its transition (Isaacs-Martin 2012; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa 1998). In Northern Ireland/the North of Ireland (NI)<sup>1</sup> the 1998 Good Friday Agreement played a similar role in uniting the society towards a peaceful future. However, over the last 20 years, both in South Africa and NI, this has been eroded by persisting inequalities and failures to address the legacies of the past. Both societies remain deeply divided. In NI, this has been exacerbated by Brexit and the uncertainty of Northern Ireland's

---

1. The name of Northern Ireland/the north of Ireland carries political significance and is what is referred to as the 'Constitutional question': Unionist and Loyalist communities tend to refer to the constitutional jurisdiction of Northern Ireland, whilst Nationalist and Republican communities tend to refer to the North of Ireland. For this reason, this paper is inclusive of both terms.

position in the United Kingdom, and by the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive (2017–2020) which left the society without a government for three years. It is likely to be further exacerbated by the economic impact of the current COVID-19 lockdown measures. In the absence of a vision for society based on the common good, this has the potential to negatively impact on building the confidence of young people to deal with the legacy of the past, actively participate in society and build hope for the future.

In the interests of building a shared and peaceful future in which all the members of the society can flourish, this paper argues there is a need to keep a spotlight on reconciliation and explore the question of where to next for reconciliation within the youth work sector. Moreover, it argues that this requires developing a vision of the common good and reflecting on what it means in NI.

Finally, the recommendations in this paper have been informed by research carried out by Youth Link: NI with almost 200 young people and youth workers in post-primary schools and youth groups across the society<sup>2</sup>. The sample group included equal representation along gender lines and across both Catholic/Nationalist/Republican and Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities.

### What is the ‘common good’?

The common good is a term that has been used throughout history significantly shaping both religious and Western political thought. Underpinning the pursuit of the common good is the question ‘what kind of society do we want’? While the concept can be traced back to Aristotle who first used it to conceive of the political conditions required for living well and leading a good life, more recent and robust thinking on the common good is found within Catholic social teaching. It defines the common good as ‘the whole network [or set] of social conditions which enable human individuals and groups to flourish and live a fully, genuinely human life’ (Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales 1996, 15). In other words, the common good is about a vision of society in which all humans can flourish and live up to their full potential. However, it also provides the framework in which to articulate how far a society must go to reach their vision of a shared and flourishing society and what elements are required to implement that vision (Volf 2011; O’Ferrall 2012). There are four key principles underpinning the concept of the common good.

The first relates to **human dignity** which recognises the equality of all humans and that every human life is worthy of respect.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the common good becomes a recognition of our common humanity. Intrinsic to this principle of human dignity

---

2. This paper draws on research carried out with Youth Link: NI in the period 2017-2019. The research formed part of a project entitled ‘Remembering the Past; Shaping the Future’ funded by the NI Community Relations Council and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Republic of Ireland.

3. Some would extend this definition to also include animals and plants

is the notion of *equality and justice*; to be treated justly acknowledges a person as a member of the community. Thus, the common good includes looking after the social wellbeing of individuals, especially the most vulnerable in (social justice). It also includes ensuring that goods and services, such as access to health care and education, which makes people's lives possible, are equitably shared across in society (distributive justice) (Hollenbach 2002, 197). Consequently, the common good requires that social structures (such as those that promote classism, poverty, sexism, racism, sectarianism and other forms of discrimination and inequality) are reformed in such a way as to respect the human dignity of all. This should include the promotion and safeguarding of human rights which are fundamental to establishing stability in divided societies recovering from the gross abuse of human rights. Significantly, implementing a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, which was part of the Good Friday Agreement, has yet to materialise. With Brexit underway, and with the Conservative Party seeking to withdraw from the European Convention of Human Rights, Smith and McWilliams (2017) argue this is a particularly crucial matter as it risks securing fewer rights for fewer people in the UK.

The second principle underpinning the common good relates to understanding our human **interconnectedness** and interdependence. It recognises that as humans we are dependent on others and the accomplishments of our ancestors for our wellbeing; alone we can do very little (YOUCAT Foundation 2016). This sense of interconnectedness is well-expressed in the African philosophy or worldview of *uBuntu* which shaped the proceedings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa 1998; Krog 2008). Essentially, the philosophy encapsulates what it means to be human and speaks to an identity that only makes sense in relation to others; it recognises that one's wellbeing is inextricably linked with the wellbeing of one's community and the broader society (including our perceived enemies). It encourages people not just to look at what their group is getting (or not getting) from social and political institutions, but to look at the needs of the whole society. Consequently, strong emphasis is given to placing communal interests above individual interests. This contrasts with individualism (dominant in Western societies) in which the individual is the primary entity and the interests of the individual are placed above the interests of the collective.

This leads to the third principle of the common good: **solidarity**. Sandel (2009) argues that the conditions for pursuing a good life cannot be achieved through justice and equal rights alone but can only be achieved if people see themselves as members of an interconnected community. Recognising that our lives are deeply intertwined with the lives and wellbeing of the 'other' (whether it's another person, group or nation) the pursuit of the common good commits us to show compassion and empathy, and to be responsible and work for the good of all individuals (and not just those with whom we perceive to share similar ideologies). Moreover, it obliges us to consider the impact of our actions and decisions (socially, economically, and politically) both in the present and on future generations (YOUCAT Foundation 2016).



Giving expression to common good is the principle of **civic participation** and taking an active role in society. Hollenbach (2002, 196) argues that the common good requires citizens to act justly and in ways that help meet the basic needs of other members of the society by, for example, creating employment opportunities and overcoming discrimination and exclusion. Actively participating in civil society through both formal and informal political processes can contribute to this and influence the way in which a society's institutions, such as health care, are made available to all the members of the society.

From these principles it is notable that the common good is an extremely relational concept which seeks to place human dignity and the wellbeing of every individual at the centre of the social and political sphere. Moreover, it reflects the fundamental principles of good youth work including equity, diversity, and interdependence (Wilson 2016) and Northern Ireland's Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy (Department of Education 2011). Significantly, the common good is not an imposition of a single view of 'the good life' on individuals or a society (which can lead to oppressive systems such as Apartheid in South Africa). It also goes beyond simply thinking about the good for the greatest number of people. It requires us to ask about the impact that public policy has on the most vulnerable groups and on how we live and relate to each other (including across historic lines of division).

### Challenges to the common good

In reflecting on what the common good means in the context of NI, there are several debates and challenges that need to be explored.

First, the common good is often shrouded in **suspicion**. This stems from the way it has historically been (ab)used both religiously and politically. For example, from a religious perspective, the Reformation led to competing visions of 'the good life' that resulted in lethal and bloody conflict that continues to keep churches and societies divided. Similarly, competing political traditions and visions of the good life, such as those outlined in the 1916 Easter Proclamation and in the Ulster Covenant, have also often led to oppressive and repressive regimes, and violent bloodshed. With growing debate around the Constitutional Question (whether NI should remain in the UK or be united with Ireland) a vision of the common good risks being sabotaged by competing political agendas that keep people polarised (as illustrated in the Brexit debates). To transcend this, a deeper understanding of the common good needs to be fostered and embraced.

Suspicion surrounding the common good has contributed to a second challenge, namely, **diversity** and difference being seen as a threat rather than something that can enrich society. Indeed, competing visions of a good society make it difficult to achieve a strong sense of unity, community and social cohesion. Despite the seemingly

incompatible goals a diverse (and divided) society encompasses, Hollenbach (2002, 13) argues it is reasonable and possible to identify aspects of 'the good life' that are common to all humans regardless of their different religious and cultural traditions. However, if the hope for a vision of what a shared and united society might look like is lost, Hollenbach further argues that the best that can be hoped for is that differences will simply be tolerated. Consequently, the challenge for policymakers (including those in the youth sector) is to create an environment in which differences enrich society rather than cause anxiety, and in which diversity can contribute to the common good (Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life 2015).

This leads to a third challenge for pursuing the common good, namely **individualism**. This school of thought sees a person's individual freedoms, independence and autonomy as some of the most important values within a society. Significantly, it moves away from an understanding of human interdependence and collective responsibility without which the common good cannot be achieved. As Hollenbach (2002, 27) cautions, it can lead to a lack of concern about the quality of life in a society. Individualism can also raise leadership challenges for the implementation of human rights if, indeed, the needs of all who live in the society become less important than the needs of one's own group or even nation (Kellerman 2004).

In a globalised world we cannot escape that humans (and the natural environment) are increasingly deeply interconnected with each other. This is exemplified by the challenges surrounding Brexit; including the rights of EU citizens to remain in the UK; the complexities around the Irish border; and whether to leave or remain in the single market and customs union. It is further evidenced in the global impact of ISIS and the threat of extremism, climate change and the impact this is having on our weather systems, migration and what has been dubbed the 'refugee crisis', the rise of a xenophobic and racist right-wing nationalism in many European countries, and more recently in the impact of the COVID-19 global health emergency. Significantly, these global challenges, which bring with them the threat of terror attacks, coupled with concerns around economic wellbeing, and the environmental sustainability of the planet, are contributing to a strong feeling of insecurity among young people. Arguably, this sense of insecurity (and associated anxiety) will erode their sense of safety and wellbeing in the present day (both physically and mentally). Indeed, Northern Ireland has one of the highest suicide rates in Europe, particularly among young men. Recognising that youth work has already begun focusing on young people and their mental wellbeing, there is a need for a deeper understanding how this converges with what many perceive as growing global insecurity. Youth work that can engage with such complexities surrounding mental wellbeing will be integral to promoting human dignity and pursuing a society based on the common good.

A further challenge to pursuing the common good in NI is the **legacy of the past**; NI remains a highly segregated society where very little is shared, including its history, which remains deeply contested. Different communities continue to be referred to in binary terms i.e. Catholic/Nationalist/Republican (CNR) or Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist (PUL). Not only does this exclude new communities coming to Northern Ireland from being able to participate in the society, but it also entrenches fixed notions of identity

making it almost impossible to move beyond the past into a more diverse future (Bollaert 2019). Recognising that funding bodies use these terms for equality monitoring purposes, arguably, they are no longer fit for purpose, particularly among young people. The youth sector needs to find more meaningful ways of engaging young people that transcends the language of the two communities.

Significantly, within the youth work sector there is acknowledgement that the legacy of the past is an area it struggles with (see also: Morrow 2019, 45). In part, this could be due to a perception among many young people that they are not impacted by the Troubles. While this underscores how violence has become normalised within the society, it also raises the question as to how youth work can help young people recognise the legacy of the Troubles in their own lives.

### **The common good: Towards an agenda for reconciliation in youth work**

A recent Young Life and Times survey indicates that young people are less optimistic about the future of community relations than adults (Schubotz 2017). Moreover, for many young people, reconciliation and dealing with the past can often seem both irrelevant and somewhat passé. Indeed, histories of conflict and their legacies can often be (over) prioritised when dealing with the past, to the detriment of envisioning the future. The common good provides a framework for overcoming that dichotomy. It does this by creating and inspiring hope in a shared and inclusive vision of the future; a future in which one can actively participate in building. In postconflict societies, this might include dealing with legacies of conflict. In a society where optimism for positive community relations among young people is diminishing and there is a growing sense of insecurity, maintaining an agenda for reconciliation in youth work that is based on a vision of the common good becomes crucial. Moreover, this could provide the anti-sectarian education framework for promoting reconciliation within the youth work proposed in the Sectarianism in Northern Ireland review (Morrow 2019). In working towards such an agenda several recommendations can be made.

First, a deeper understanding of the common good that transcends divisive politics needs to be fostered and embraced. Youth work can play an important role in educating young people about the common good and helping them to explore the kind of society they want to live in, understand the interconnected nature of society, and move it towards a positive peace.

To do this, the youth sector needs to create spaces for meaningful conversations. These spaces need to encourage critical thinking around the principles of the common good, what we understand about community, and how we look after our environment and each other. They also need to be secure enough for people to feel free to explore their concerns and aspirations, and other questions raised by the common good, without feeling compelled to jettison their tradition. Crucially, they need to extend a generosity towards the 'other' that shows that each of their futures is equally important and connected. Moreover, in a society in which violence has become normalised, these spaces need to equip people with skills that promote non-violent transformation of conflict. In the current decade of centenaries, which includes the 100th anniversary of Ireland's partition, and as Brexit forces the constitutional question into the open, these

spaces will take on greater importance. Youth work can help provide the space in which young people can talk together about their fears, anxieties, hopes and aspirations, and about political and civic frameworks for the future that may or may not be within the DUP or Sinn Féin narratives.

With young people struggling to identify how they are impacted by the Troubles, these spaces can become difficult to navigate.<sup>4</sup> This requires a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how young people are impacted by the Troubles and how this intersects with the additional insecurities (such as Brexit and the sustainability of the planet) they are facing. The learning from such research needs to raise awareness among young people about how they have been affected by the complexities of the past in a way that equips them with skills to navigate the future and pursue the common good.

Second, cross-community youth work should consider shifting its focus from identity-based work to addressing issues of shared concern (such as the environment, equality issues, employment and mental health). This is not to diminish the contribution youth work has made towards fostering positive intergroup relations. However, one of the challenges associated with cross-community work is its tendency to focus on narrow and fixed interpretations of identity which can act to reinforce polarised identities. By shifting that emphasis towards engaging in shared issues, youth work would not only foster positive crosscommunity relations in a way that transcends historical lines of division, but it would also enable civic participation towards the common good. Indeed, mobilising youth towards increased civic participation was one of the recommendations to the youth sector put forward in the 'Sectarian in Northern Ireland Review' (2019, 45). Not only is the youth sector well-placed for mobilising young people but it has already begun to do this through its engagement on social issues such as mental health, LGBTQ+ rights and other equality issues. However, to bring about this shift, the youth sector will need to work closely with funding bodies and community relations' policy makers.

Third, the youth sector needs to consider implementing more structured training (either formal or informal) for youth workers on the issue of reconciliation and what it means to live in a deeply divided society. Such a training would need to increase understanding surrounding different perspectives of the past; address traditional understandings of nationality and competing nationalisms; engage with how the past can be remembered and commemorated in a way that promotes the common good (and does not entrench division); explore the transgenerational impact of the Troubles and increase understanding on how young people experience trauma, and promote civic participation among young people (for which the youth sector is well-placed). Importantly, it would also need to engage with the definition of reconciliation, and the value of the common good in youth work and in society more widely. Moreover, it would need to include skills training on how to manage and engage in controversial topics and on how to communicate and promote change using non-violent means.

---

4. For research on the transgenerational impact of the Troubles see: Commission for Victims and Survivors (2015).

## Conclusion

Do we want a society that remains segregated and separated or one that is integrated, inclusive and welcoming of people with different nationalities, political persuasions, race and ethnic backgrounds, and sexual orientations, to name a few? In NI, such a vision raises important questions around inclusion and how we work and live together, even with people with whom we hold deep disagreements and radical differences. It also raises concerns around how to build a future that goes beyond being 'equal but divided' but that is interconnected so that everyone can reach their full potential together and not at the expense of one community over another. Moreover, the common good encourages us to hold a sufficiently plural vision of Northern Ireland / the North of Ireland that rejects violence and does not forget the real needs of people around joblessness, mental illness, and homelessness. Indeed, a society can only flourish when the needs of all are met. The common good provides an ethical framework for the decisions we make and the policies we support. In a diverse society, where there is no single vision of the good life, such a framework becomes particularly important.

## References

Bollaert, Cathy. 2019. *Reconciliation and Building a Sustainable Peace: Competing Worldviews in South Africa and Beyond*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. 1996. 'The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching.' Accessed 3 June 2020. [http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/THE-COMMON-GOODAND-THE-CATHOLIC-CHURCH\\_1996.pdf](http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/THE-COMMON-GOODAND-THE-CATHOLIC-CHURCH_1996.pdf)

Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life. 2015. *Living with Difference: Community, Diversity and the Common Good*. Cambridge: The Woolf Institute.

Department of Education. 2011. 'Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education.' *Community Relations, Equality and Diversity NI*. Accessed 3 June 2020. <http://credni.open.wp-dev.web.tibus.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/CRED-Policy-March-2011-English-PDF.pdf>

Commission for Victims and Survivors. 2015. *Towards a Better Future: The Transgenerational Impact of the Troubles on Mental Health*. Belfast: Commission for Victims and Survivors. Accessed 3 June 2020. <https://www.cvsni.org/media/1171/towards-abetter-future-march-2015.pdf>.

Hollenbach, David. 2002. *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Isaacs-Martin, Wendy. 2012. 'National Identity and Distinctiveness: Developing a Common Identity in a Nation State (with reference to South Africa).' *Africa Insight* 42(2): 169–170.

Jaede, Maximilian. 2017. 'The Concept of the Common Good'. Working Paper No. 8, Edinburgh: Global Justice Academy, University of Edinburgh.

Kellerman, Barbara. 2004. *Bad Leadership: What it is, How it Happens, Why it Matters*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Krog, Antjie. 2008. "...if it means he gets his humanity back...": The Worldview underpinning the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.' *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 3(3): 204–220.

Lederach, John Paul. 1998. *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. Washington: United States Institute of Peace.



## References

Morrow, Duncan. 2019. *Sectarianism in Northern Ireland: A Review*. Belfast: Ulster University.

O’Ferrall, Fergus. 2012. *Towards a Flourishing Society*. Dublin: TASC.

Sandel, Michael, J. 2009. *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to do?* London: Penguin Books.  
Schubotz, Dirk. 2017.

*Taking Stock: Attitudes to Community Relations and a Shared Future among the First Post-Conflict Generation in Northern Ireland*. Research Update. Belfast: ARK.

Smith, Anne, and Monica McWilliams. 2017. ‘Now Is the Time to Re-open the Debate about Progressing the Northern Ireland Bill of Rights.’ U. K. Constitutional Law Association. Accessed 3 June 2020. <https://ukconstitutionalaw.org>.

*Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa*. 1998. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Volume 1. Cape Town: Juta.

Volf, Miroslav. 2011. *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ should Serve the Common Good*. Grand Rapids. MI: Brazos Pres.

Wilson, Derick. 2016. *Young People: Future Citizens of a Shared Society and an Interdependent World?* Belfast: Understanding the Conflict Trust.

YOUCAT Foundation. 2016. *Docat: What to do? The Social Teaching of the Catholic Church*. London: Catholic Truth Society.

# A MNEMONIC DEVICE FOR BELFAST: DRAWING THE RING OF STEEL

Kate Catterall



# A MNEMONIC DEVICE FOR BELFAST: DRAWING THE RING OF STEEL

## Abstract

Belfast's socio-political and psycho-geographic landscape was shaped by the Troubles, a 30-year ethno-nationalist conflict (1968-98). On-going redevelopment of Belfast's center has erased obvious traces of the conflict, making it an uncanny environment for an aging population. The Bloomfield Report's proposed memorial remains unbuilt. Generationally, there are four fractured images of Belfast. Discontinuity in the image of Belfast, between generations and classes, is palpable. Parents, grandparents and children lack shared reference historic and psycho-geographic reference points. This paper explores the 'ring of steel' project, which aims to support transgenerational communication about the Troubles and bridge these four fractured images of Belfast. The project offers collective remembrance triggered by a physical and emotional recognition of spatial change within shared public space and it introduces subtle traces of the conflict to a portion of the population unfamiliar with the period as lived experience.

KEY WORDS: *Design & critical heritage, mnemonic device<sup>1</sup> (oed 2020) personal and collective memory; shared place/public space; transgenerational transmission of memory.*

## Introduction

A Troubles memorial was delineated in The Bloomfield Report (1989); a discrete, mausoleumlike venue, as yet unbuilt (Catterall 2011). On 20 June 2020<sup>2</sup> Drawing the Ring of Steel<sup>3</sup> (Coaffee 2003), a 16-hour live engagement event, will facilitate public recollection through one of a few mutual experiences of the conflict, a security cordon that encircled the city; protecting and rendering suspect an entire population.

Traversing architectural drawings inscribed on the street, audiences inhabit this past, aligning everyday life during the Troubles with contemporary airport experiences; initiating storytelling between generations; visitors and locals.

---

1. The concept of 'Mnemonic Device', presented by the author in workshop documents, is a hybrid between the OED definition of a mnemonic as 'memory aide' and reference to the Northern Irish punk band 'Stiff Little Fingers' and their 1979 track entitled 'Suspect Device'.

2. Due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, this event has been postponed until September 23rd, 2021.

3. The 'ring of steel' was the name used by the security forces for the security cordons in Northern Ireland (1972–1998). It has subsequently been used as the name for crowd control/security strategies in central London and elsewhere.



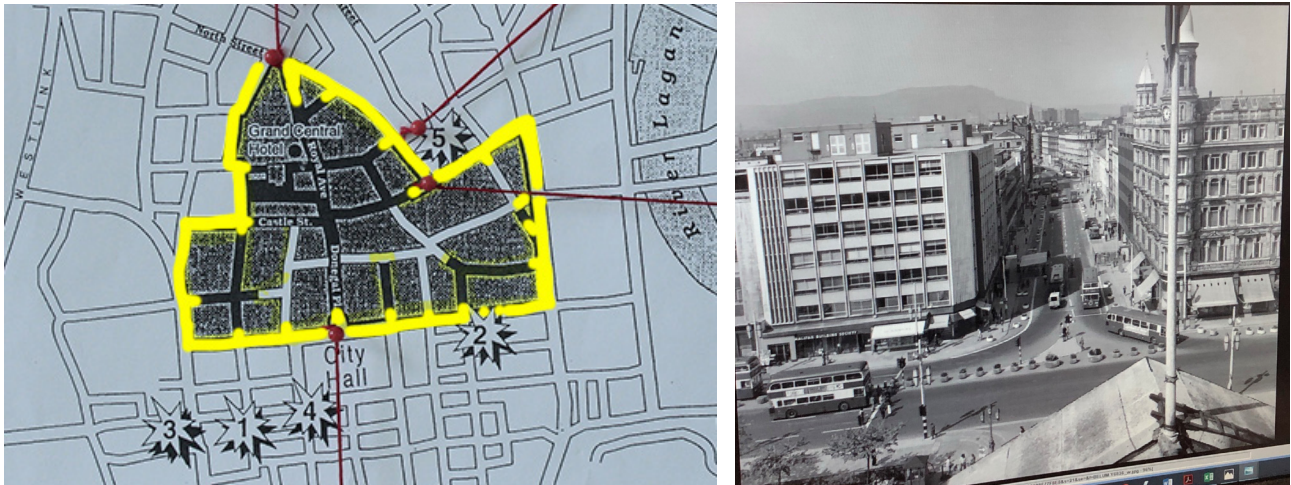


Figure 1. Left, Map of the Ring of Steel (Brown 1984) Right, Image of Donegal Place, from Belfast City Hall, 1976. Arrow locates new vehicle & pedestrian checkpoint/ gate, part of the 'ring of steel' that replaced four discrete security segments 1972–76 The city centre was locked nightly at 6pm at this time, killing the previously dynamic, nightlife of central Belfast. Image: National Museum, Northern Ireland (Photograph: NMNI Archive, BELUM Y6838).



Figure 2. Donegal Place, 1995. Caption 'Gates to go as heart of city pumps life'. It is interesting to note the aesthetics of the checkpoint by this time; black, decorative and low profile. Akin to the gates of the City Hall opposite; rendered invisible before their ultimate. (Photograph) Belfast Telegraph 6 March 1995.

The cordon synonymous with the conflict, was hastily constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers thereafter determining aesthetic decisions in Belfast's built environment. Few design drawings survive, so a series were (re)constructed for Drawing the Ring of Steel from ordinance survey images, news footage, materials from the National Archive (U.K.) and on-site research.

Drawing the Ring of Steel and a legacy website including interactive GIS mappings of the structures (1972–2002), invite ongoing public discourse about contemporary impediments to shared remembrance/peace-building; a legacy of the Troubles.

### **Four cities: four generations**

Between 1968 and 1972 fissures appeared along ancient townland boundaries in Belfast, activating them as sectarian boundaries during the Troubles conflict. By 1972, ad hoc security structures were pervasive in Belfast's working-class neighbourhoods and the city centre: they evolved into a network of permanent barriers, which came to be known as 'peace walls', and a semi-permanent barrier in the city centre called the 'ring of steel'. The conflict resurrected vivid memories of World War II for older generations, but their children, born after the war and then in their 30s, saw the socially vibrant and optimistic city of their youth quickly disappear.

For those born in the 1960s, memories of Belfast are synonymous with the 'ring of steel' a security cordon of steel security fences, concrete barriers and barbed wire, that encircled the city from 1972 until the 1990s. Their Belfast was a semi-lawless, dangerous, exciting place of poverty, punk, protest and pain, as represented in the Ulster Museum's 'Troubles and Beyond' gallery (NMNI 2018). This phantasm was replaced by an uncanny, post-industrial city.

To children of the peace process, Belfast is again a place of charming façades and opportunity, a destination city with a burgeoning tourist economy. Visitors flocking to see monuments to fictional historic moments which comingle with actual histories of an industrial past as filtered through the lens of Hollywood. Property developer's renderings extend this ideal, wealthy image of Belfast populated by young, middle-class, inhabitants, and erasing physical evidence of the Troubles and perhaps those who endured that time. Discontinuity in the image of Belfast, between generations and classes, is palpable. Parents, grandparents and children lack shared historic and psycho-geographic reference points, as Belfast is remade to negate unpalatable pasts.

### **Bloomfield's memorial troubles**

*'Monuments at the end of the 20th century are thus born resisting the very premises of their birth. The monument has increasingly become the site of contested and co-*

*opted meanings, more likely the site of cultural conflict than of shared national values and ideals'* (Young 1992, 65). In a region of 1.6 million people, nearly 4,000 died and an additional 107,000 people are estimated to have suffered some physical injury during the 30-year conflict, Compared 'per capita within the entire USA, [... it] would have produced a death toll of over 500,000, approximately ten times the number of Americans killed in the Vietnam War' (O'Leary 2019, 37). Such an event cannot remain unmarked and should be negotiated in the shared public space.

*A Mnemonic Device for Belfast* is a design continuation of my critique (Catterall 2011) of the Bloomfield Report's memorial proposal (Bloomfield 1998), a memorial concept which became mired in the complexities of 'a hierarchy of victimhood' (Jankowitz 2014, 9); it remains unbuilt 22 years later. Ostensibly, elements of the memorial called for in Bloomfield's proposal have already been implemented through various organisations. For example, Wave Trauma Center provides space for 'rest and reflection, care and counselling'. 'An appropriate archive[s] of the Troubles' has also been addressed by a number of projects, including Healing Through Remembering's innovative memory projects, University of Ulster's Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN), and Queen's University Belfast's Oral History Archive.

Physical memorials to the Troubles are found in discrete grave sites, 'spontaneous memorials' (Doss 2008, 9) and gardens of remembrance and mark the lives of individuals, paramilitary groups and members of the security forces. These places cater to the unique needs of separate communities while a memorial which acknowledges a shared remembrance of the conflict is obviously absent.

### **Drawing the Ring of Steel: a mnemonic device for Belfast**

In reaction to a series of car bombings in Belfast city centre during early 1972, six security segments were erected to protect the commercial centre from attacks. By 1976, the segments were consolidated into one larger enclosure. This 1.5-mile-long 'ring of steel' cordon took the form of a highly fortified perimeter fence punctuated by entry checkpoints and exit turnstiles. Four main checkpoints were located along the main north, south, west and east arteries into the city centre and were opened to allow pedestrian and limited bus and delivery vehicle access only between 8am and 6pm each day. A Mnemonic Device for Belfast utilises a redrawing of the 'ring of steel' as a mechanism by which to recall and present to the city one of a few mutual experiences of the violence; checkpoints which at once protected the commercial centre and rendered the entire population suspect.

### **An experiment: proof of concept**

At dawn on the morning of 6th June 2015, the author conducted an experiment toward the design of a mnemonic memorial. On Donegall Place, opposite Belfast City Hall, with chalk a section of the historic security barrier that had encircled Belfast from





*Figure 3. Left photograph, Kate Catterall. Ad hoc memorial for two UDR officers killed by a bomb while manning the Royal Avenue security checkpoint in 1986, a good example of a 'Spontaneous Memorial' the term coined by Jack Santino referring to, 'murder sites in Northern Ireland that had become shrine sites: places visited by families and supporters of victims of political assassination; places physically transformed by their gifts of flowers, notes, and other objects; places accorded special, even sacred, status by ritualised acts and offerings of everyday urban pilgrims'(1992). New crosses are nailed to a tree near the location each year in remembrance, by family, or colleagues. The poppy icon declares their protestant heritage as it perhaps aligns their deaths with official war deaths from WW1 and WW2. Center photograph, Kate Catterall. The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) Memorial Garden behind the PSNI Headquarter, Knock Rd. Belfast. Right, Falls Garden of Remembrance to the Fallen Volunteers of "D" Company, 2nd Battalion, Belfast Brigade. Photograph, Cedric D. Morrison.*

1972 to 1998 was marked in chalk and tape. Concerned police officers from Grosvenor Road Police Station observed this via security cameras and sent two officers to make enquiries. One enquired after a permit, the other officer in his 50s walked over the lines on the ground quietly and remembered. He and the younger officer stopped to discuss the drawing. 'This is where the barricades were'—'I don't remember them at all'—'haven't you seen the photographs back at the station?'—'Yes, but that wasn't here, so close to city hall'— and so they continued. Permission to quickly complete and photo-document the prototype was given, but more importantly for the experiment, they had inadvertently proven that drawing the ring of steel could support transgenerational communication about the Troubles and bridge four fractured images of Belfast.

### **The mnemonic device workshops**

'Taming wicked problems requires many people' (Rith and Dubberly 2006). Part of the process in developing the memorial project has been to conduct crosscommunity workshops on memorials to the Troubles. The six workshops conducted to date which



Figure 4. (Right) Photographs: Donegall Place security cordon; a.k.a. the ring of steel. (Photograph, *The Belfast Telegraph*, 1976). (Left) Drawing the Ring of Steel, prototype. 2015 (Photograph Kate Catterall, 2015)

have involved the participation of students, community groups leaders, government departments, researchers, and NGOs have utilised the conceptual positioning of 'Drawing the Ring of Steel' to focus participants attention on the shared, even mundane, experiences of the conflict and away from remembrance of sensational events, or divisive figures.

The proposals have explored how life proceeded against that backdrop of the Troubles, they have unearthed humorous stories, poignant memories and unsettling questions about the legacy of the conflict and its impact on contemporary society. The workshops were devised to engage a broad cross-section of the community, to aide participants in the development of unique design proposals and to measure the appetite for marking the Troubles in Belfast. The process undertaken in each workshop has been documented for later exhibition and publication, and the workshopping process itself has successfully reignited a vigorous civic discourse about the possibility of marking the Troubles era in Belfast.

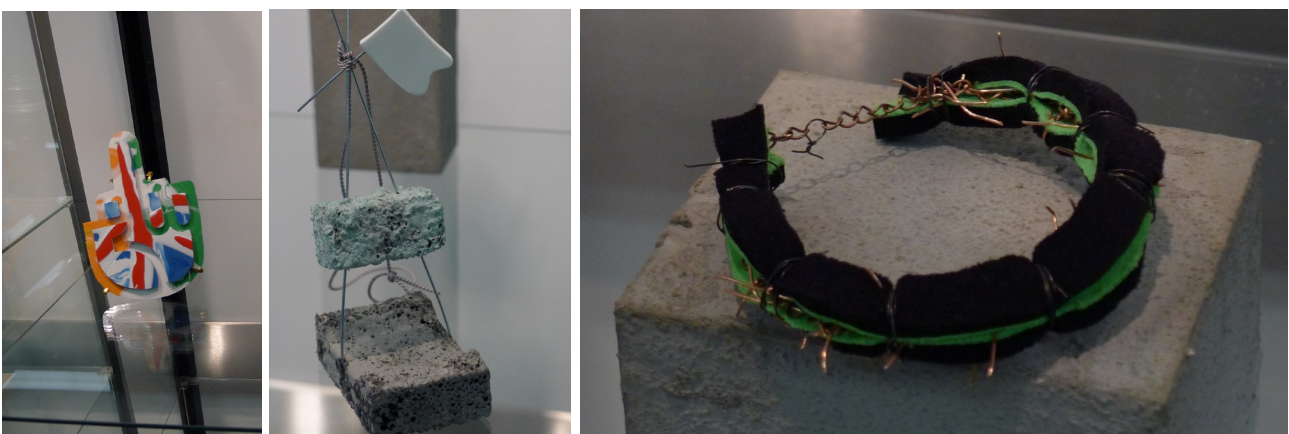
Another workshop was hosted by the urban design collective called PLACE: Built Environment Centre. They also recorded a podcast of an archaeological walking tour of the ring of steel to initiate the workshops (McCabe and McCafferty 2018). That workshop yielded proposals for a values-driven youth workshop in East Belfast and a forest planted with a tree for each person killed during the conflict.





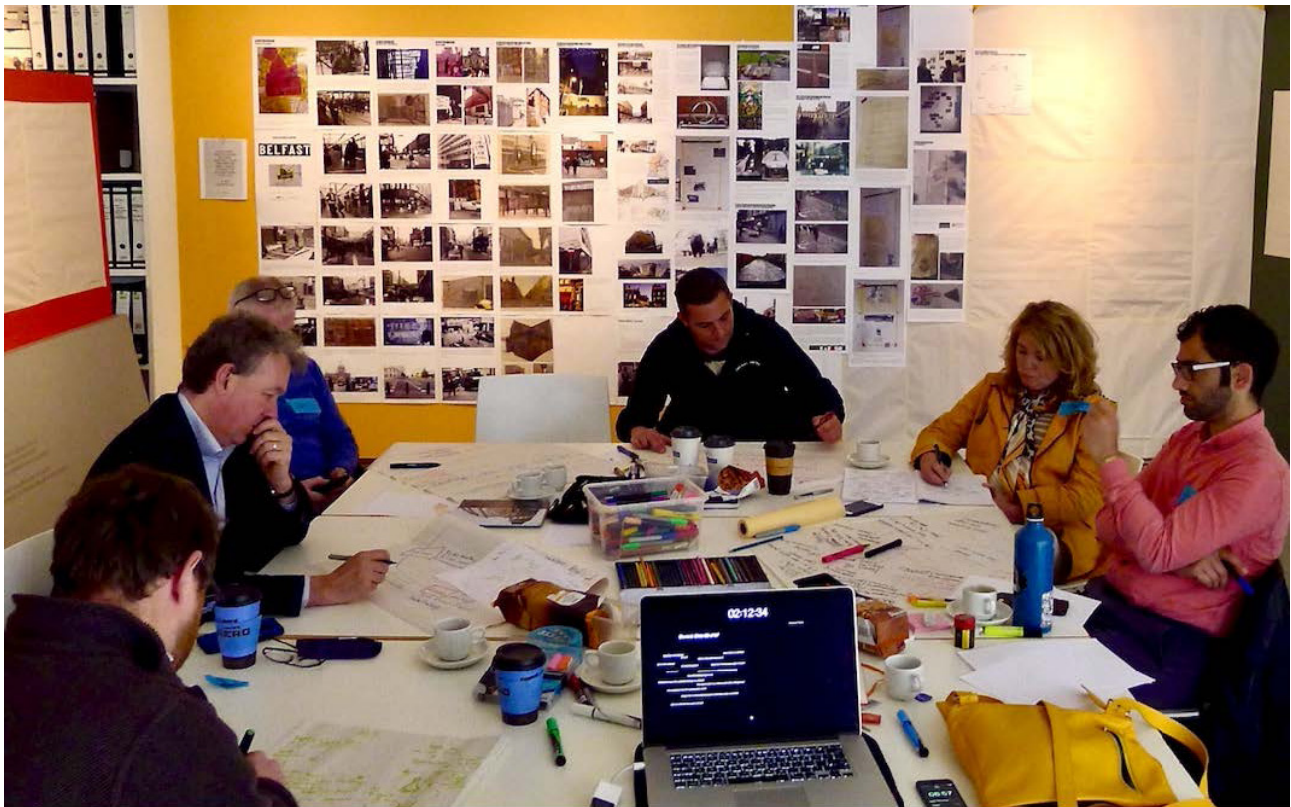
**Figure 5. June 2016. Workshop #1 at Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast<sup>4</sup>**

Another proposal which came from the workshop was a project to map and document the ring of steel by James Bamford. James became a project partner and developed the mapping concept into a remarkable interactive research site, that introduces visitors to the evolutionary timeline of the ring of steel 1972–2020. The interactive mapping is now a central piece in the ‘legacy website’ designed to house documentation of the performative event and subsequent transcriptions of narratives gathered at the event and contextual research.



**Figure 6. Proposals from the second round of one-day workshops, University of Ulster, March 2017. A collection of wearable conversation starters. Anne Boylan Earls Jewellery course, 2017.**

4. Three participants viewing images of the security cordon ‘ring of steel’ 1972–1999, after walking the route of the cordon prior to workshopping concepts for their own memorial devices.



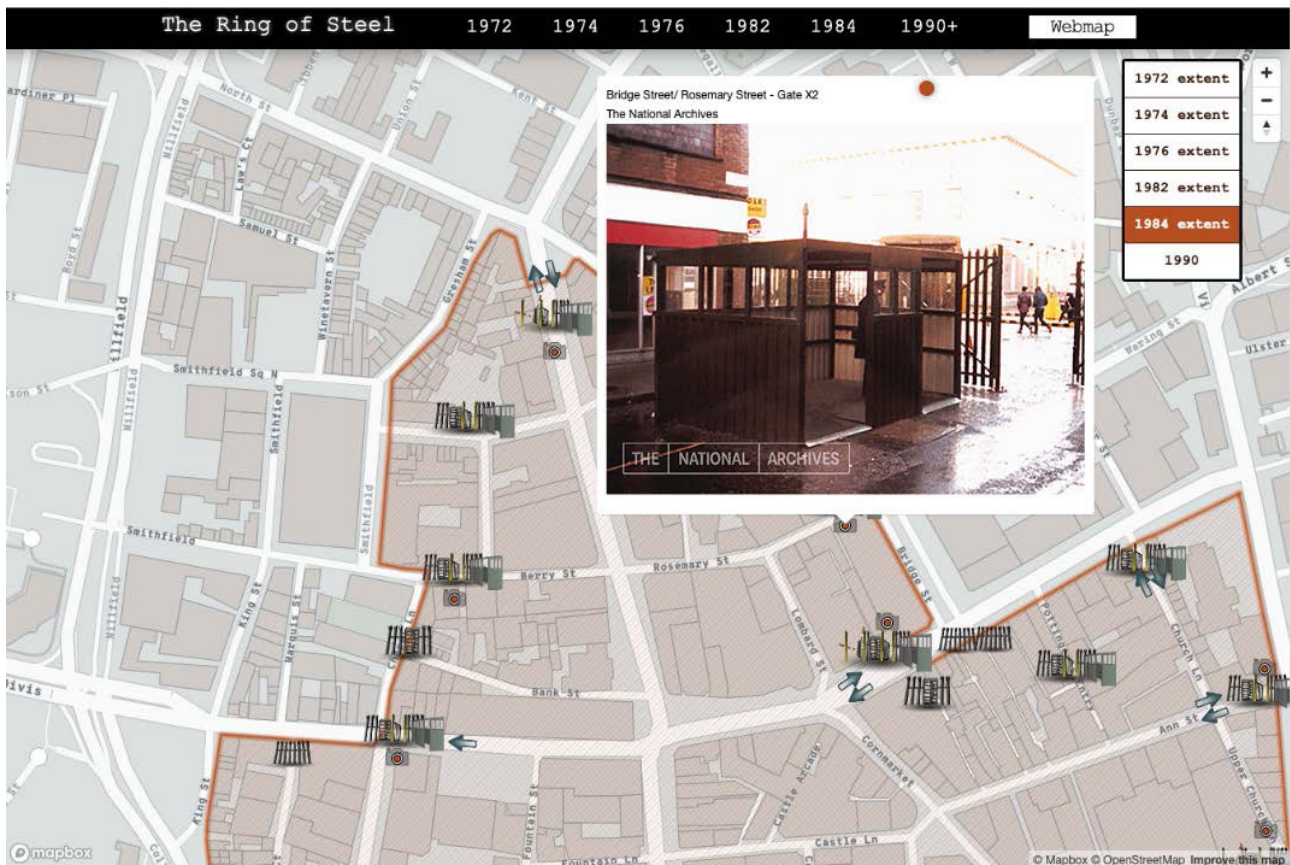
*Figure 7. Workshop at Place: Centre for the Built Environment. June 2019. Photograph, Kate Catterall*

### **Drawing the Ring of Steel: locating memory and meaning in downtown Belfast**

After meeting at the Peace and Beyond Conference in 2018 the author approached Paula McFetridge, Creative Director of Kabosh Theatre Company<sup>5</sup> to discuss drawing the ring of steel, which initiated a partnership to develop the performative component of the event. From there the form and parameters for the mnemonic device coalesced. The event would speak directly to all those who had 'endured' the conflict, not survivors or victims. The primary audience would be locals rather than tourists. It would be performative and ephemeral not a constructed memorial. It would celebrate resilience and those lives lived against the backdrop of violence. It would evoke the quotidian experiences, rather than spectacular episodes. Drawing the Ring of Steel is designed as a theatrical performance to be staged at the sites of the four security checkpoints around the city centre. This image of the Troubles era security cordon, one of the few culturally mutual experiences of the conflict, will reappear on 21 June in 2020; a remarkable date on which no violent events occurred during the thirty-year conflict. This participatory event should facilitate story-telling across communities and between generations, between locals and visitors and should acknowledge all those who endured that period before it passes from living memory. Traces of the old barricades in the form of carefully drawn schematic plans will be inscribed on the ground at the specific locations of the old checkpoints using yellow chalk, paint and tape. The sixteen-hour performance will engage audiences throughout the day as they walk to and from the city centre.

5. Kabosh Theatre <https://kabosh.net/production/greenandblue/>





*Figure 8. Belfast's Ring of Steel: A GIS mapping project (James Bamford, Northern Mapping Services, in consultation with Kate Catterall, and funded by a CRC digital publication grant; [belfaststringofsteel.com](http://belfaststringofsteel.com)). Images kindly provided by the National Archive, National Museums Northern Ireland and by esteemed Belfast photographer Martin Nangle.*

At each checkpoint performers will redraw the lines of the security checkpoints and barriers and will enact choreographed search-motions. Other performers in period 1970's dress, will interact with the public, engaging them with questions about their memory or knowledge of the 'ring of steel' and collecting stories of remembered encounters at the cordon. Flash mobs of performers will flood the four checkpoints at key moments creating additional levels of theatrical engagement.

The event acknowledges the experience of Belfast's aging generations and makes visible a larger history omitted from official stories of Belfast; even as it is regularly explored by curious visitors utilising a growing number of private, conflict tourism enterprises. The event is designed to welcome older members of the community into the newly refurbished social spaces of Belfast's urban centre inviting their insights, memories and stories to become part of the current city; regaining their 'right to the city', as imagined by Henri Lefebvre (1968).



Figure 9. Illustration of *Drawing the Ring of Steel*, live engagement event. Performers/installation crew (yellow), performers/Journalistic interviewers (back left). Plan drawings: temporary lane delineators, chalk-paint & non-slip safety tape. (Preliminary design drawings, Kate Catterall, 2018).

### Beyond the barriers: Next steps for drawing the Ring of Steel

A legacy website will function as a repository for ongoing research related to the Troubles period and its impact upon the built environment. More specifically it will house documentation of the performative *Drawing the Ring of Steel*, transcriptions of stories recorded on the day of the event and the interactive GIS mapping of the evolution of the 'ring of steel' from 1972 to the present.

The ephemeral performative drawing may serve as a study for a more permanent installation, with drawings inscribed in steel, or brass, rather than chalk. Like Edwin Lutyens' Cenotaph, constructed first from wood and plaster, then stone, *Drawing the Ring of Steel* could evolve to mark the conflict, within the context it occurred, in perpetuity.





*Figure 10. Map locating all four main gates/entrances punctuating the ring of steel. The four installation sites to be encountered --Donegal Place (S); Royal Avenue (N); Castle Street (W); High Street (E). (Kate Catterall, January 2020)*

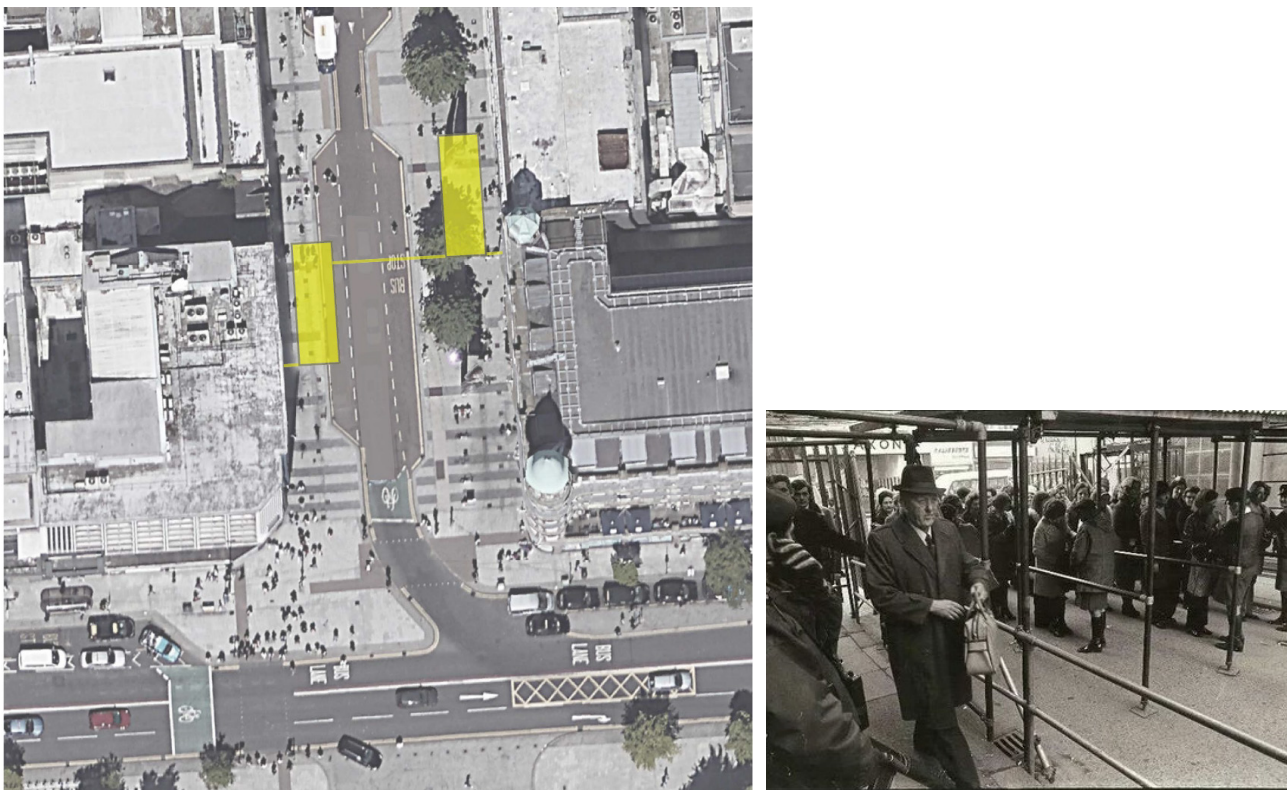
An exhibition at University of Ulster York Street and Belfast Exposed gallery will show documentation of the one-day performative event, relevant photographic research materials and design development documents. A concurrent symposium will address the design of Belfast's urban environment and its impact on the peace process.

The 'ring of steel' mapping project may also evolve to include GIS interactive mapping of Belfast's ancient townlands and the ubiquitous 'peace walls' which align. Moving out from Belfast in concentric circles the site may ultimately include a mapping of three possible Irish borders debated prior to 1921.



## Conclusion

In 2013, a woman stood in Donegall Place with her daughters, 5 and 7-years old, struggling to describe a Belfast, she knew as a girl. She happened upon a cognitive bridge to connect their worlds; something current and familiar to help introduce the children to the Belfast of her own childhood. She urged them to imagine security checkpoints, just like the ones at the airport, right here and you have to go through the checkpoints every day to go shopping. They got it, and she discovered a link to make my life back then accessible to future generations. Recognising that this feat of



*Figure 11. Left, describing location of performance site to the South on google map of Belfast today. (Kate Catterall, 2020). Right, new checkpoints, Castle Street Belfast (Belfast Telegraph 1976)*

transgenerational communication had proven impossible for many, set in motion a process leading to the design of a mnemonic marker for the Troubles, culminating in the performative *Drawing the Ring of Steel*.

The project offers collective remembrance triggered by a physical and emotional recognition of spatial change within shared public space and it introduces subtle traces of the conflict to a portion of the population unfamiliar with the period as lived experience. It will mark how far we have come as a society, by the absence of the 'ring of steel', while recognising the scale of the endeavour yet to be undertaken toward becoming a healthy, informed, inclusive society devoid of such barriers.

If considered as a cognitive bridge Drawing the Ring of Steel, and projects like it, can also serve to support and 'build social cohesion and reconciliation so that everyone has a sense of belonging' (U. K. & Irish Governments 2020, 31), connecting disparate images of Belfast and reconnecting all generations with their city.<sup>6</sup>



*Figure 12. Catterall, Kate. 2016. Bollards that frequently replaced the ring of steel and that one day may be removed and replaced by a steel line drawing so ceding again 'The Right to the City is the right of all inhabitants, present and future, permanent and temporary, to inhabit, use, occupy, produce, govern and enjoy just, inclusive, safe and sustainable cities, villages and human settlements, defined as commons essential to a full and decent life' (2020. Home. <https://www.right2city.org>)*

6. The 'New Decade, New Approach' (NDNA) Deal negotiated the restoration of the Northern Ireland Executive after a three-year hiatus, endorsed by all major political parties on January 10, 2020.

## References

- Abramson, Daniel. 1999. *Make History, Not Memory*. No. 9 / Constructions of Memory: On Monuments Old and New. Harvard Design Magazine. <http://www.harvarddesignmagazine.org/issues/9>.
- Bamford, James. 2020. Belfast Ring of Steel GIS interactive mapping. <http://belfastringofsteel.com/>
- Bloomfield, Sir Kenneth. 1989. *'We Will Remember Them': Report of the Northern Ireland Victims Commissioner*. Design, origination, print commissioned and managed by The Stationery Office Northern Ireland. Accessed 28 Jan. 2020 <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/violence/victims.htm>
- Brown, Stephen. 1985. *Central Belfast's Security Segment: An Urban Phenomenon*. Area, 17(1) (March 1985), 1–9. The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20002110> Accessed: 13–02–2020 18:32
- Catterall, Kate, 2011. *'Collapse: The Erasure of Time, History and Memory in the Urban Landscape of Northern Ireland'*. In *Visual Rhetoric and the Eloquence of Design*, edited by Leslie Atzmon, Parlor Press, LLC.
- Coaffee, Jon. 2003. *Terrorism, Risk and the City: The Making of a Contemporary Urban Landscape*. Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Doss, Erika. 2008. *The Emotional Life of Contemporary Public Memorials*. Amsterdam University Press. (Page 9. Santino, Jack. 1992. Not an Unimportant Failure: Rituals of Death and Politics in Northern Ireland. Displayed in Memorial Light, ed. Michael McGaughan. Antrim Arts Council).
- Forthspring Inter Community Group. 2014. (Various contributors) *Forthspring 5 Decades Project: Talking about the Troubles*. European Union (EU) Peace III Programme.
- Governments, U. K. & Irish. 2020. *The New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) Deal*. Commitments to Northern Ireland.
- Jankowitz, Sarah E. 2014. *The Order of Victimhood: Violence, Hierarchy and Building Peace in Northern Ireland*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lavery, Dermot & Michael Hewitt. (Directors). 2019. Doubleband Films Production for BBC Northern Ireland & Northern Ireland Screen. <https://www.Lostlivesfilm.Com/>

## References

Lefebvre, Henri. 1968. *Le Droit à la ville*, 1996 [English translation *The Right to the City*]. Electronic Source. Accessed: 1 May 2020. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/henri-lefebvre-right-to-the-city.pdf>

Logan, Karen. Ulster Museum Troubles Gallery. 2018. Curator [https:// www.nmni.com/collections/history/troubles](https://www.nmni.com/collections/history/troubles). Accessed 4 June 2020

McBride, Alan. Wave Trauma Center. [https://wavetraumacentre.org.uk/who-we-are/wavecentres/ belfast/](https://wavetraumacentre.org.uk/who-we-are/wavecentres/belfast/)). Accessed 3 June 2020.

McCabe, Rebekah & Conor McCafferty (producers). 2018. Infinite City Podcast. Season 1: Episode 2. *Remembering the Ring of Steel with Kate Catterall*.

McCahill, Mike. 2019. Wed 16 Oct 2019 09.00 EDT. Last modified on Wed 18 Dec 2019 10.15 EST <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/oct/16/lost-lives-review-troubles-northern-ireland-documentary> - documentary City. Accessed 20 May 2020. <https://www.right2city.org/>

McKittrick, David. 1999. *Lost Lives: the stories of the men, women, and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland Troubles*. Edinburgh: Mainstream.

O'Leary, Brendan. 2019. *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume I: Colonialism*. Oxford University Press.

Queens University Belfast. 1998- George Mitchell Centre. Oral History Archive <https://victimsandthepast.org/dealing-with-the-past/oral-historyarchive/>

University of Ulster, 1998 - Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN) <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/>

Thornton, Chris. 2020. Lost Lives: An egalitarian 'monument to the dead' <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-51480198>

Turner, Kate. 2019. *Healing Through Remembering*. <https://healingthroughremembering.org/> Accessed 21 May 2020.

Young, James E. 1992. 'The German Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany A mnemonic device for Belfast 2021 58 Today'. *Critical Inquiry* 18 (2) (1992): 267-96. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343784>.

# FACILITATED DIALOGUE: THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF FR ALEC REID

C. K. Martin Chung<sup>1</sup>





# FACILITATED DIALOGUE: THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF FR ALEC REID

*'The Word has become flesh in the conflict in Northern Ireland and lives in the midst of it.' –Fr Alec Reid C.Ss.R. (2017d, 145)*

## Abstract

This essay analyses the 'peace ministry' of Fr Alec Reid C.Ss.R. (1931–2013), who was instrumental in the 1980s and early 1990s in the Northern Ireland peace process especially in fostering dialogues within the nationalist community. It seeks to account for Reid's political theology by way of contextualising his words and deeds in the wider European theological landscape of his time, with special reference to the 'new political theology' of Johann Baptist Metz and Catholic Social Teaching.

The argument is that, although elements of Reid's political theology of facilitated dialogue can be traced variously to post-Vatican II theological developments in the Catholic Church, the Redemptorist tradition, and theological reflections by his contemporaries in Northern Ireland, his unusual emphasis on the interventionist role of the Church in a 'conflict situation' can only be explained by his deep concern for the 'next-victim-as-neighbour', which in turn seems to have arisen from the 'inappropriate guilt' he felt for the victims of republican violence.

KEYWORDS: *Alec Reid, Northern Ireland, political theology, dialogue, conflict resolution*

## Introduction

For those who have some knowledge of the Northern Ireland peace process, which brought the modern Troubles to a close in 1998, the name Alec Reid would not be unfamiliar. Neither a politician nor somebody in a position of power, the Irish Redemptorist priest has been credited by historians and political scientists alike for having played – among others – an indispensable role in paving the way for the Irish Republican Army (IRA) ceasefire in 1994, which in turn straightened the path for the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1998 (Sandal 2017, 94; English 2003, 264–285). By creating out of practically nothing an intra-nationalist dialogue in the 1980s and

---

1. C. K. Martin Chung, Assistant Professor, Department of Government and International Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong; Visiting Research Fellow, Centre for the Study of Ethnic Conflict, Queen's University Belfast, UK. Correspondence: ckmartin@hkbu.edu.hk. This work was supported by the Research Grants Council, University Grants Committee, Hong Kong (project no.: 22612318).

1990s among constitutional nationalism, Irish republicanism and the Irish state,<sup>2</sup> the Clonard sagart [Ed: Irish word for priest] has earned a well-deserved place in the history of not only the north of Ireland but the island as a whole and Irish-British relations (Ryder 2013).

Much as the peacebuilding efforts of Fr Alec Reid C.Ss.R. (1931–2013) have been documented and appreciated, his ‘peace ministry’ has been much less analysed and understood – until recently. The fact is, Reid was more of a peace practitioner rather than a peace preacher, working behind the scenes most of the time and preferring others to be shone the limelight. Hence his own conceptualisation of his political activities as pastoral in nature and himself as ‘an agent of the Holy Spirit’ in a situation of human conflict has been given much less clarification (and attention) than the ‘peace philosophy’ of his contemporaries (e.g. Hume, Fraser and Murray 2013). With Martin McKeever’s ‘One Man, One God’ (2017), a major gap in the theological history of the Troubles is filled. While unreservedly acknowledging this work by a fellow Redemptorist as the primary gateway to Reid’s life and thinking, the present essay seeks to outline in a much shorter format the political theology of without doubt one of Northern Ireland’s greatest Catholic peacemakers.

By ‘political theology’ it is meant here broadly the ‘theological reflection on the concrete political practice of Christianity’ (Moltmann 2015: 14). With political reconciliation it is useful to adopt a theological analytical approach to make understandable the ‘reasoning’ of religious or religiously-based actors, which often overwhelms self-interest-driven and instrumentalist paradigms (Smyth 2005; Pruitt 2008). In particular, we shall focus on the scriptural basis of Reid’s political theology, the particular formulations he employed to explicate his thoughts, and the wider theological contexts – the Catholic European Zeitgeist, the Redemptorist tradition<sup>3</sup> and the contemporary inter- and intra-church dialogues in Northern Ireland – in which the word of Reid ‘happened’.

As we shall see, the Irish Redemptorist was no ‘systemic’ political theologian creating vast systems of thought capable of answering each and every political question. He was rather an ‘ordinary priest’ literally caught up in crossfire who responded in a politically impactful way – the way of ‘facilitated dialogue’ – based on a certain theological foundation. It is to the description of this foundation that this article is dedicated with the aim to provoke discussion and emulation.

---

2. Following convention in the literature, ‘nationalism’, ‘unionism’, ‘republicanism’ and ‘loyalism’ in lower case refer to their respective political ideologies/convictions, whereas the same in upper case refer to particular party or organisational identities.

3. According to Fr Michael Kelleher C.Ss.R. (2020), Reid ‘followed in the footsteps’ of another Irish Redemptorist peacemaker, Archbishop Patrick Clune (1864–1935), who is known for his role in the (unsuccessful) negotiation between London and Sinn Féin in the early 1920s. Among contemporary Redemptorists, Fr Sean O’Riordan (1916–1998) – as a leading moral theologian of his generation – was ‘especially significant’ for Reid. Furthermore, the Redemptorists have been active not only in Northern Ireland but also in other conflict ‘hotspots’ such as Mindanao in southern Philippines. A Filipino missionary once told the author that they are sometimes jokingly called the ‘Redeem terrorists’.

### The theological contexts of 'facilitated dialogue'

Alec Reid was 18 when he joined the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in 1949, which was founded by St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696–1787). The post-World War II period was one of epochal changes inside the Catholic Church. By the time Reid got involved in one of his first significant 'dialogical interventions' in the mid-1970s – that is, to resolve an intra-republican dispute (McKeever 2017, 23; Adams 2018, 256–257) – the Church had already experienced (if not quite begun to digest the full implications of) the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which inaugurated the long process of renewal within the Church.

The Redemptorists contributed to this process. Among the more prominent of these was Bernhard Häring C.Ss.R. (1912–1998), a moral theologian famous for his 'Das Gesetz Christi' (The Law of Christ), who brought the Alphonsian influence to bear on one of the key documents of Vatican II – 'Gaudium et spes' (GS), or the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (McDonough 1997). A couple of passages from this document, which counts also among the foundational texts of Catholic Social Teaching (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2005), would later find real-life application by Reid in the Troubles. From seeking to understand the 'ways of thinking' of those who 'think or act differently than we do in social, political and even religious matters' (GS 28), to the necessary differentiation between 'error' and the 'person in error', the Clonard priest would exemplify these principles by his own initiatives of intra-nationalist dialogues.<sup>4</sup>

Outside and alongside Vatican II, a 'new political theology' was born in post-war Europe. If 'joy and hope' (the literal meaning of 'Gaudium et spes') were made of more 'positive' and 'lighter' substance, the new 'fundamental theology' that also came to define the post-war Catholic theological landscape was of a darker and heftier origin: Catholic guilt for the Holocaust. In the words of Jürgen Moltmann, one of its chief proponents: 'The New Political Theology emerged in Germany under the shock of Auschwitz' (2015, 8). In their diagnosis, a pattern of Catholic middle-class behaviour partially accounted for why there was so little Christian resistance against the Nazi regime in Europe: the widespread opinion that 'religion is a *private* matter and has nothing to do with public life and politics'. The new political theology sought to correct that (Metz 1977, 31; Moltmann 2015, 9; emphasis added). With Reid's theology of 'facilitated dialogue', we will also see the controversial claim that the Church has a much more *public and political* role to play in the context of violent conflict than most of his contemporaries – though not all – were ready to acknowledge, much less follow suit.

Another leading thinker of the new political theology was the late Johann Baptist Metz

---

4. With the backing of bishops, superiors and fellow Redemptorists, Reid would be able to tread the thin line between being an independent 'agent of the Holy Spirit' for dialogue and representing the Church hierarchy at the same time, the relationship of which with the republican movement has such a long and difficult history that trust could not simply be assumed to be present, as Reid readily conceded (2017b, 136).

(1928–2019), who counted amongst the significant ‘turners’ who sought to turn post-war Germany away (‘umkehren’) from that path that had led to Auschwitz (Chung 2017, 150). It was the Bavarian theologian – whose war experience, like Häring, had informed his theologising (Ashley 2003, 243; O’Riordan 1977, 680) – who attempted to divert the Catholic compassion for the passion of Christ from traditional anti-Judaism in Christianity, to cultivate a heightened sensitivity towards the *suffering of others* – first and foremost the Jewish victims of the Shoah. According to him, Christians are to ‘heed the prophetic call of the stranger’s suffering’ (as Christ’s suffering) and to exercise ‘the freedom to suffer another’s suffering’ (with the freedom of Christ), while the Church is to be the ‘the public memory’ of this suffering and this freedom against all totalitarian systems (Metz 2007, 88–90). ‘The dark prophecy of this suffering of others’ must be heeded if the Church is to hear and to proclaim the word of Christ (2007, 94). In Reid, we would find a heedful practitioner and exponent of this new political theology who was evidently moved to act by the suffering of the last and the next victims of the Troubles regardless of their political colours.

Within Northern Ireland itself, the rising death tolls in the early 1970s and the sporadic but sustained confrontations afterwards also prompted local Christian communities to engage in a prolonged process of collective soul-searching. From the Joint Group on Social Questions (later Irish Inter-Church Meeting, IICM) to the Inter-Church Group on Faith and Politics (ICGFP) and the Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI), just to name a few, dialogues among and within churches in the island of Ireland during the Troubles have offered variegated theological answers and solutions.<sup>5</sup> Among the shared features of these joint reflections is what can be called principled secularism: the conviction that it is not for the churches to offer political blueprints or political programmes to solve the problem of violence, but only moral frameworks within which these programmes can be evaluated (Joint Group on Social Questions 1977, 62; ICGFP 1989a, 4.2.2, 6.11). And while the official inter-church dialogues tended to focus on condemning violence and the analysis of social injustice and social complicity underlying sectarianism (Working Party on Sectarianism 1993), the unofficial and intra-Evangelical ones went further to accuse fellow Christians of having committed ‘idolatry’ ‘in our worship of the gods of nationalism, of loyalism and republicanism’, which was ultimately responsible for the divine punishment in the form of the Troubles (ICGFP 1989b, VII; ECONI 1998, 24). One can readily discern the ‘prophetic’ approach in these collective reflections in which scathing critique and self-critique against oppression and false worship were the main motifs. This stands in sharp contrast – though not necessarily in opposition – to the ‘pastoral’ approach that Fr Alec Reid undertook to ‘remove the gun forever from the nationalist side of the age-old conflict in Ireland’, as he conceived to be the main objective of his ‘pastoral ministry of peace’ (Reid 2017b, 137).

---

5. On these various dialogues and initiatives, see Mitchel (2003, 260) and Power (2008).

### The political theology of 'facilitated dialogue'

There is little ambiguity as to which biblical role model Reid took for dealing with a conflict situation: 'we can learn from the pastoral example of Jesus Himself... He communicated directly with those whom He wished to influence including people who were condemned by the official Church of the time as the worst of sinners and outlaws' (Reid 2017b, 136). All of the main characteristics of the Redemptorist priest's 'pastoral approach' to peacebuilding flow from this single image of Jesus dialoguing with sinners (Mt 9:10–13).

To begin with, a Christian who wants to serve for peace 'in a conflict situation' must not satisfy herself with 'pulpit-type condemnations' (Reid 2017b, 136) of violence and political idolatry,<sup>6</sup> but get down to the 'flesh-and-blood reality' of the conflict itself (2017d, 141). 'The serving Christian must stand in the middle of the conflict and encounter it in all its flesh-and-blood reality until he comes to understand it with the knowledge of direct, personal, front-line experience,' which will then enable him to 'identify the moral dimensions of good and evil which are involved in causing and driving the conflict' (2017d, 139). The 'crucial scriptural guideline' for Christian peacemakers, therefore, according to Reid, is a beginning verse in the Gospel according to John: 'The Word was made flesh and lived amongst us' (1:14a).

To be the 'pastoral agent of the Holy Spirit' (Reid 2017d, 139) *already* in a conflict – that is, not just talking about it or theorizing on it – is to be somebody who can use her companionship to change political behaviour. 'Jesus used companionship as a means of exercising His pastoral influence and leadership' (2017d, 141). The image of Jesus as 'the companion of all kinds of sinners' (2017b, 136; 2017d: 142) thus has 'crucial significance for the role of the Christian in a situation of conflict' (2017d, 141).

Hence echoing the biblical distinction between 'sin' and the 'sinner' (Genesis 4:7) reiterated in 'Gaudium et spes', the Redemptorist dialogue-initiator took those to task who objected to dialogues with terrorists on moral grounds: 'The Christian, therefore, cannot say: "There are some people in this conflict with whom I will not associate because I regard them as sinful participants", since to do so would clearly contradict the example of Jesus' (Reid 2017d, 143). Rather, opportunities for communication must be taken – and created, if they are not readily available – for the transformation of behaviour and mindset.

The pastoral ministry of peace is thus 'essentially a ministry of communication' (Reid 2017d, 144). And because of her 'pastoral responsibility', the Church must 'use her resources, her influence and her lines of communication to encourage, promote and, when necessary, even to facilitate' dialogues to resolve political conflicts (2017c, 132).

---

6. It is obvious that Reid also took note of the idolatrous and secularising tendencies (2017b, 135). But this line of thought is not emphasised and followed through in his 'pastoral approach', in contrast to the 'prophetic approach' of the ICGFP and ECONI.

‘Pastoral’ because there are ‘moral and humanitarian issues’ at stake (2017c, 131). In other words, in such a situation, religious intervention in politics in the form of creation and organisation of ‘forbidden dialogues’ is not going beyond the remit of the Church but part of her Christlike mission.

On the practical side, the Church-as-facilitator can offer a political ‘vicarious sacrifice’, so to speak, to take the blame for the scandalous dialogue between political opposites such as elected politicians and ‘terrorists’: the Church can ‘provide the kind of sanctuary setting where the parties to the conflict... can meet together for the necessary dialogue without damaging their own political or moral credibility and without compromising or appearing to compromise any of their own democratic principles’ (Reid 2017c, 132). Hence when ECONI was admonishing fellow Evangelicals in 1988 to do repentance as essentially a face-losing exercise in order to ‘become a community of hope’ in a conflict situation (1998, 24), Reid’s pastoral approach was trying to offer a face-saving sanctuary for constitutional nationalists and republicans to hold ‘necessary dialogues’ for peace.<sup>7</sup>

The facilitator must also not be content with having hosted and witnessed difficult dialogues – which often fail to go beyond the setting out of well-known differences, as the initial talks between SDLP and Sinn Féin showed (Mansergh 2019, 106) – but work to make sure that there are concrete answers and solutions coming out of them. As it were, discipleship sometimes also means providing people with a *solution* to their problems, not just setting the scene for them to find it themselves (Mt 14:15–16). And here Reid brought to bear his own insight of the republican mindset, which he had both inherited (from his mother’s side) and earned during his long ministry with republican prisoners (McKeever 2017, 19–22).

‘I am convinced... that the republican movement will not be persuaded to give up its armed strategy for a political strategy unless it has first been satisfied that such a strategy would be organized enough and strong enough to pursue effectively the broad thrust of the traditional aims of Irish nationalism in the political setting of the 1990s (Reid 2017b, 137).’<sup>8</sup>

Because of this conviction, the Redemptorist facilitator would not tire of being a champion of the pan-nationalist ‘democratic dynamism’, proposed as the non-violent substitute to armed struggle for an alternative constitutional future (Reid 2017e, 152–

---

7. Whether the face-saving device was effective or not is another question. John Hume, leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), for instance, was no stranger to media attacks due to his engagement in talks with Republicans (English 2003, 333; McKittrick and McVea 2012).

8. Once again, the pastoral approach of Reid’s took a different route to the problem of mutually exclusive political ideologies. Nationalism – and by extension unionism – is not condemned out of hand as idolatrous, but considered as legitimate in itself, only needing a non-violent political strategy, not an armed one. In hindsight, one can say that such a recognition belongs to the foundation on which the GFA was built. Whether the moral ‘minimalism’ (all priorities can remain intact as long as violence is out) in such an approach has become an obstacle to political reconciliation in the post-GFA period is another question



153).<sup>9</sup> Such a 'consensus strategy' agreed by SDLP, Sinn Féin and the Irish Government, which formed the basis of the IRA ceasefire of 1994 (2017e, 149), was only achieved after years of 'facilitated dialogues', in which Reid served as witness and messenger (Reid 2017e, 162; Mansergh 2019, 108), as he did in that iconic moment of the Troubles when the priest was photographed administering the last rites to two British Army corporals killed in the fateful March of 1988 (Scull 2019, 150).<sup>10</sup>

### Accounting for the political theology of 'facilitated dialogue'

Witnessing others' victimhood is one thing, recognising one's *personal* guilt in it is another, much less the theological reflection on what a Christian should do *politically* about that guilt. Fr Alec Reid seemed to have gone through this path to his political theology of facilitated dialogue. McKeever highlights a 'moving account of his decision to engage' more politically, in which we have 'probably the most intimate statement' of Reid on his personal motivation:

'So I went along one night to a wake in a house in the Clonard area ... it was the wake of an innocent nationalist who was shot by the loyalists ... I was kneeling down saying the rosary with them, and the next thing this woman ... went over to the coffin and she started to caoineadh [to keen] ... then I remember thinking I have to do something about this' (McKeever 2017, 29).

That a Catholic priest felt moved by the mourning for a nationalist victim of loyalist violence in Northern Ireland is not remarkable. What is remarkable is that the thought of 'needing to do something about it' ended up as facilitating an intra-nationalist dialogue to end republican violence. If one wanted to do something about nationalist victimhood, why not do something to end loyalist violence or 'state violence and injustice' – as supporters of liberation theology in Northern Ireland argued (McVeigh 1999, 3)? Or at least one should facilitate an inter-communal dialogue to end violence on both sides instead of singling out 'the nationalist gun' in the conflict equation.

To answer this question, the author borrows an insight from Revd Harold Good, the Methodist counterpart of Reid as independent witnesses to IRA decommissioning in 2005 (Walsh 2017, 67). According to McKeever, Reid repeatedly expressed during the interviews 'regret about what he should have done', which Good characterised as 'inappropriate guilt' (McKeever 2017, 199, n. 31).<sup>11</sup> What could have instilled a sense

9. According to Martin Mansergh, special advisor to successive Taoisigh and participant in the secret dialogues, Reid was no mere spectator of the discussions, but was also 'indefatigable in drawing up position papers', including drafts of the British-Irish joint statement (2019, 106).

10. Reid was carrying a 'Sinn Féin paper for the SDLP' that day when that happened (McKeever 2017:33–35).

11. Inappropriate insofar as a juridical or psychoanalytical concept of guilt is applied, according to which the Redemptorist pastor was certainly innocent or unnecessarily 'burdened'. But if the concepts of 'guilt contexts' (*Schuldzusammenhänge*) or 'structures of sin' are applied, which the Catholic Social Teaching propagates (see for instance John Paul II (1987, 36)) and which the IICM's conception of the 'sectarian pyramid' accentuates (Working Party on Sectarianism 1993, 23), then Reid's sense of 'omission' could only be a manifestation of this guilt awareness (*Schuldbewusstsein*). His choice of the biblical word *caoineadh* (Mt 11:17; An Bíobla Naofa 1981) points to this awareness.

of guilt in the Clonard priest can be glimpsed from his letter (dated 19 May 1986) to John Hume, leader of SDLP, inviting him to consider the proposals to establish SDLP-Sinn Féin dialogues under Church auspices. In the first part of this letter explaining his personal motivation, Reid wrote:

'My only aim is to help those people who, if the present situation continues, will be killed, injured or imprisoned over the next few weeks and months... it was the death of a UDR [Ulster Defence Regiment] man in South Armagh about two and a half years ago that sparked off the efforts which my colleagues and I have been making since then to end, once and for all, the violent situation which is causing such tragedies' (Reid 2017a, 113).

That 'UDR man' could very well be Thomas Cochrane, who was kidnapped and then killed in South Armagh in October 1982. Reid had accompanied an IRA member to the location to save the victim but they were too late (McKeever 2017, 27–28; Scull 2019, 123). The fact that Reid cited – of all possible victims of sectarian violence – the example of a victim-other, or a victim who belongs to the other community rather than one's own – in his letter to persuade a *nationalist* leader 'doesn't make sense' at first glance. Shouldn't he have used an example of a nationalist victim – like the one and many others whose wake he had attended – in order to be more politically persuasive? But he didn't. He chose to be silent on the death of Joseph Donegan, a fellow Catholic, who had been killed in a related kidnapping by loyalists in the same October (Scull 2019, 123). Instead, he insisted to his nationalist letter addressee that 'it was only when the UDR man ... was killed and I felt that the Church and priests like myself could and should be playing a more active and effective role in ending this kind of tragedy' (Reid 2017a, 113).<sup>12</sup>

The political theologian is not a politician. It is not about scoring political points by representing political interests or playing into sectarian hatred. The 'sagart' proceeded from an acute sense of guilt as a Catholic pastor who had born witness to the *victimhood of the other*, who had been killed – by all likelihood he knew – by another Catholic 'faithful in every other way' (Reid 2017b, 135). That is why the goal was to end political violence from the nationalist side, and the means was an intra-nationalist dialogue to convince republicans of a viable political alternative to their 'military dynamism'. Reading back this way, it all makes sense, for the victimhood of the other was the 'trigger' of Fr Alec Reid's decisive peace ministry and political theology of facilitated dialogue. As he recounted telling Gerry Adams – president of Sinn Féin – bluntly to his face before it all began: 'our objective was to stop people being killed and our *first* objective was to stop our people killing, that was the IRA' (McKeever 2017, 30; emphasis added).

---

12. It could have been a simple case of political inaptitude on the part of the priest, but it seems implausible, for elsewhere in the letter, Reid took great care in picking materials to support his pro-dialogue proposal to Hume. For instance, he inserted lengthy excerpts from Fr O'Riordan's comments on Gerry Adams' open letter to Bishop Cahal (later Cardinal) Daly (Reid 2017a, 119–123). But he included only those positive comments that gave the impression that Adams was an open-minded dialogue partner with a valid question for the critics of republican violence, while leaving out the much more critical (and substantial) comments as 'not really relevant' (Reid 2017a, 122; O'Riordan Undated).

Metz could not have reformulated his 'memoria passionis' better than Reid did for Northern Ireland: 'I don't belong to any political party, but I represent the next person who is going to be killed in the Troubles. The church has a moral obligation to get stuck in when people are suffering and to try and stop it' (Crutchley 2014). The difference is only that being a member of the oppressed minority to and from whom a two-way 'trail of suffering' (Metz 2007, 94) had been laid, and with a love that raises the stranger, the Redemptorist opted to shun the path of prophetic protest against the iniquities of a state that was not his. His late outburst comparing Catholic suffering under unionism with Jewish suffering under Nazism was an aberration indeed (BBC News 2005)!

### **Conclusion: The relevance of Reid's political theology for conflict resolution**

Aberration aside, Fr Alec Reid's political theology of facilitated dialogue still has much to offer peacemakers of today. It is not a grand scheme from which answers to all important questions about the relationship between faith and politics can be expected; it only seeks to provide a concrete blueprint for what a Christian and the Church as a whole should and can do in a situation of conflict. The answer it offers – that the Church should play an interventionist role to create and facilitate political dialogues when mutual mistrust is rendering these impossible without intervention – may prove satisfactory for some and disappointing for others, e.g. those who prefer 'liberation' to 'dialogue' on the one side and those who yearn to see the Church do more for justice for the victims of republican violence on the other.

It also flies in the face of political 'solutions' that are, in one way or another, based on the internal 'division' of the conflicting parties, whether it is the age-old 'divide and rule' tactic or the modern, centrifugal variant of consociational power-sharing (McGarry and O'Leary 2017), which is characterised by the intra- instead of inter-bloc competition for votes. In the author's own political context of Hong Kong, there has never been lack of voices calling for the 'split up' (割席) of – to borrow from Northern Ireland's political lexicon – constitutional democrats and 'physical force' democrats, both of whom aim to democratise Hong Kong (within or, if not possible, then without Mainland China). The local Catholic Church has been heavily criticised for 'walking too closely' with 'physical force' democrats and failed to condemn not only violence but the violent protesters themselves. The logic of such divisive stratagem is that separation weakens the support for and hence resolve of the 'physical force' wing of the democracy movement, and the problem of political violence will eventually fade away as a result.

The political theology of facilitated dialogue, however, which grew organically from Fr Alec Reid's multiple *intra* dialogue initiatives, points to a different path, a path that avoids the risk of further political radicalisation due to isolation. Without realising it perhaps, Reid practiced what the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) now calls the 'Binding, Bonding, Bridging' (A3B) method of conflict resolution, which advocates as the first step the healing of individual traumas (binding), then strengthening understanding

'within' identity groups (bonding), before fostering dialogues and developing trust between opposing camps (bridging). First adopted in southern Philippines to resolve the land conflicts among Muslim, indigenous, and Christian inhabitants in the early 2010s, the 'A3B' model has also been proven effective elsewhere, such as in the Central African Republic (CRS 2017, 3–7). The strength of such an approach is its ability to tap into the internal resources for conflict resolution in each opposing group and 'its capacity to awaken and engage traditional and religious leaders to become community peace facilitators' (2017, 4). With the example of facilitated dialogues by Reid bonding Irish nationalists before the 'bridging' of unionists and nationalists culminating in the eventual conclusion of the GFA in 1998, one can argue that this 'cohesive' rather than divisive approach to resolve conflicts seems to have worked in Northern Ireland as well – and first among others.

## References

- Adams, G. 2018. *Before the Dawn: An Autobiography*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Ashley, J. M. 2003. 'Johann Baptist Metz'. In *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, edited by P. Schott and W. T. Cavanaugh, 241–255. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- BBC News. 2005. 'Witness likens unionists to Nazis'. Last Modified 12 Oct., Accessed 20 May 2020. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/northern\\_ireland/4336518.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/4336518.stm).
- Chung, C. K. M. 2017. *Repentance for the Holocaust: Lessons from Jewish Thought for Confronting the German Past*, Signale. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press and Cornell University Library.
- CRS. 2017. *The Ties that Bind: Building Social Cohesion in Divided Communities*. Baltimore, MD: Catholic Relief Services.
- Crutchley, P. 2014. 'IRA ceasefire 20 years on: The priest who brokered the peace'. BBC, 31 August.
- ECONI. 1998. *For God and His Glory Alone: A Contribution Relating Some Biblical Principles to the Situation in Northern Ireland*. 2nd ed. Belfast: Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland. First published in 1988.
- English, R. 2003. *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hume, J., Fraser, T.G., Murray, L. eds. 2013. *Peacemaking in the Twenty-First Century*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- ICGFP. 1989a. 'Breaking Down the Enmity'. In *Living the Kingdom*, 17–53. Belfast: Interchurch Group on Faith and Politics.
- ICGFP. 1989b. 'Towards Peace and Stability: A Critical Assessment of the Anglo-Irish Agreement'. In *Living the Kingdom*, 107–136. Belfast: Interchurch Group on Faith and Politics.
- John Paul II, P. 1987. 'Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (30 Dec. 1987)'. Accessed 24 Feb. 2019. [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html)

## References

- Joint Group on Social Questions. 1977. *Violence in Ireland: A Report to the Churches*. Revised edn. Belfast and Dublin: Christian Journals Ltd. and Veritas Publications.
- Kelleher, M. 2020. Personal communication to the author, 25 June.
- Mansergh, M. 2019. 'The Early Phase of the Irish Peace Process: The Path to the Downing Street Declaration and the First Ceasefires.' In *Brokering the Good Friday Agreement: The Untold Story*, edited by M. E. Daly, 101–111. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy.
- McDonough, W. 1997. 'New Terrain' and a 'Stumbling Stone' in Redemptorist Contributions to Gaudium et Spes: On Relating and Juxtaposing Truth's Formulation and Its Experience.' *Studia Moralia* 35: 9–48.
- McGarry, J., and B. O'Leary. 2017. 'Power-sharing executives: Consociational and centripetal formulae and the case of Northern Ireland.' In *Power-Sharing: Empirical and Normative Challenges*, edited by A. McCulloch and J. McGarry, 63–86. Abingdon, Oxon/ New York: Routledge.
- McKeever, M. 2017. *One Man, One God: The Peace Ministry of Fr Alec Reid C.Ss.R.* Dublin: Redemptorist Communications.
- McKittrick, D., and D. McVea. 2012. *Making Sense of the Troubles: A History of the Northern Ireland Conflict*. Revised and updated edn. London: Viking.
- McVeigh, J. 1999. 'The Irish Church and Republicanism: The Need for Liberation Theology.' *The Furrow* 50(1): 3–7.
- Metz, J. B. 1977. *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft: Studien zu einer praktischen Fundamentaltheologie*. Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag.
- Metz, J. B. 2007. *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*. Translated by J. M. Ashley. New York: Crossroad Publishing. Original in German: *Glaube in Geschichte und Gesellschaft*.
- Mitchel, P. 2003. *Evangelicalism and National Identity in Ulster 1921–1998*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Moltmann, J. 2015. 'European Political Theology.' In *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Political Theology*, edited by C. Hovey and E. Phillips, 3–22. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



## References

O’Riordan, S. 1977. ‘Bernard Häring’s theology of non violence.’ *Studia Moralia* 15: 679-695.

O’Riordan, S. Undated. ‘Transcript of Fr Sean O’Riordan C.Ss.R’s Reflections on Mr Gerry Adams’ Open Letter to Dr Cahal Daly, Bishop of Down and Connor.’ Electronic copy provided to the author by M. Kelleher, C.Ss.R.

*Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*. 2005. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. London: Burns & Oates.

Power, M. 2008. ‘Of some symbolic importance but not much else’: The Irish Inter-Church Meeting and Ecumenical Dialogue in Northern Ireland, 1980–1999.’ *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 43(1): 111–123.

Pruitt, D. G. 2008. ‘Back-channel Communication in the Settlement of Conflict.’ *International Negotiation* 13: 37–54.

Reid, A. 2017a. ‘Letter to John Hume.’ In *One Man, One God: The Peace Ministry of Fr Alec Reid C.Ss.R.*, edited by M. McKeever, 112–129. Dublin: Redemptorist Communications. Original letter dated 19 May 1986.

Reid, A. 2017b. ‘Priest feels Church must provide talks channel for IRA [article in the Irish Times].’ In *One Man, One God: The Peace Ministry of Fr Alec Reid C.Ss.R.*, edited by M. McKeever, 133–138. Dublin: Redemptorist Communications. Originally published in 1990.

Reid, A. 2017c. ‘Redemptorist Peace Ministry – Mission Statement.’ In *One Man, One God: The Peace Ministry of Fr Alec Reid C.Ss.R.*, edited by M. McKeever, 130–132. Dublin: Redemptorist Communications. Originally written in 1989.

Reid, A. 2017d. ‘The Role of the Servant of Christ in a Situation of Conflict.’ In *One Man, One God: The Peace Ministry of Fr Alec Reid C.Ss.R.*, edited by M. McKeever, 139–146. Dublin: Redemptorist Communications. Originally published in 1993.

Reid, A. 2017e. ‘Submission on the Decommissioning Issue in the Context of the Quid Pro Quo Accord Between the Irish Government, the SDLP and Sinn Féin.’ In *One Man, One God: The Peace Ministry of Fr Alec Reid C.Ss.R.*, edited by M. McKeever, 149–164. Dublin: Redemptorist Communications. Original document dated 17 Dec. 1995.

Ryder, C. 2013. ‘Father Alec Reid obituary.’ *The Guardian*, 24 November 2013.

## References

Sandal, N. 2017. *Religious Leaders and Conflict Transformation: Northern Ireland and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scully, M. M. 2019. *The Catholic Church and the Northern Ireland Troubles, 1968–1998*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Smyth, T. 2005. 'The Unsung Heroes of the Irish Peace Process.' *World Policy Journal* 22(1), 79–87.

Walsh, D. 2017. *Independent Commissions and Contentious Issues in Post-Good Friday Agreement Northern Ireland*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Working Party on Sectarianism. 1993. *Sectarianism: A Discussion Document*. Belfast: Department of Social Issues of the Irish Inter-Church Meeting.

# THE BOTTOM-DOWN APPROACH TO MAKING PEACE WITH THE PAST

Geoffrey Corry



# THE BOTTOM-DOWN APPROACH TO MAKING PEACE WITH THE PAST

## Abstract

The absence of a high-level Truth and Reconciliation Commission modelled on the South African TRC after the Belfast Agreement (1998), followed by the continued political stalemate to implement the Stormont House Agreement (2014), narrowed significantly the options for victim/survivors in Ireland and Britain to recover official truth about the past. Consequently, it was left to civil society agencies to fill the healing vacuum. By adding Track 4 to the bottom layer of the existing multi-track peacemaking pyramid, the sustained contribution of community-based trauma recovery and storytelling initiatives to the healing process are recognised. Because their relational methodologies and tasks are distinctly different to Track 3 and go deeper into making peace with the past, they are designated as a crucial 'bottom-down' approach that work below the 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' interventions. Such initiatives ensure that the unprocessed hurt and trauma, as well as an unresolved sense of injustice, do not get passed on to second and subsequent generations only to undermine efforts to resolve and transform the conflict.

KEY WORDS: *Post-violence phase, multi-track peacebuilding, Track 4, healing of hurt, trauma recovery, humanising process*

***'The past continues to torment because it is not past: it is not "over", "finished", "completed"'.  
– Michael Ignatieff (1996:119)***

***The Past lives on in the Present.  
– Graham Dawson (2007)***

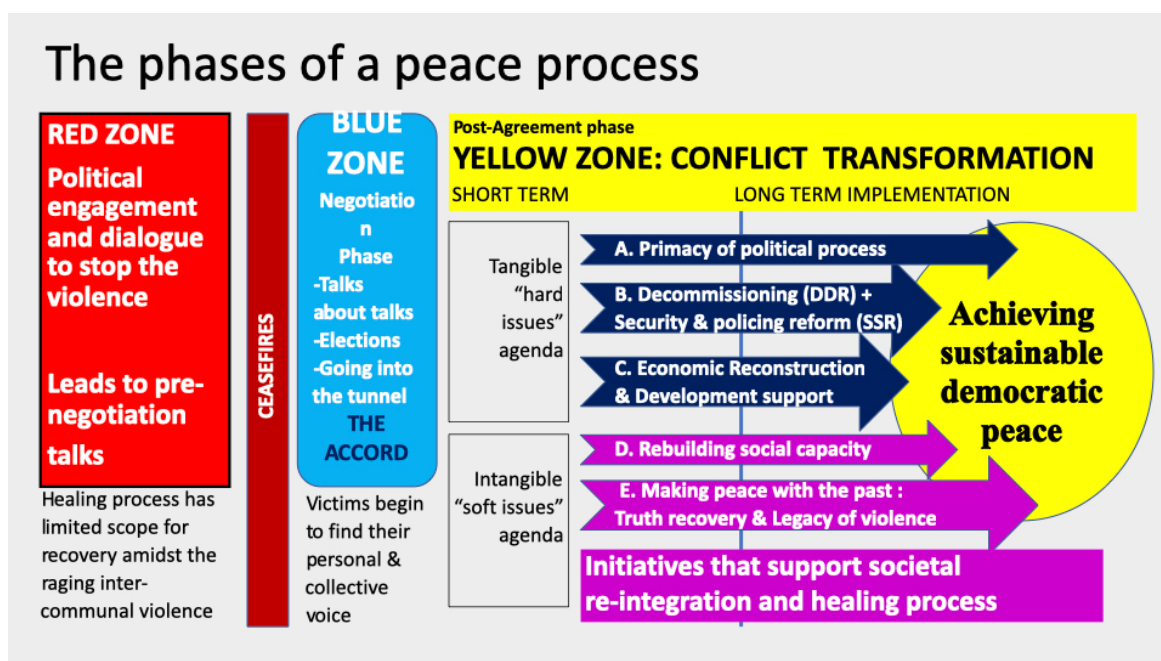
## Introduction

The question that this paper attempts to address is: Where does the post-violence unofficial healing of hurt, arising out of the political violence of the Troubles (1968–1998), fit in to existing frameworks for post-conflict peacebuilding? By 'unofficial', we mean the need to recognise the community-based initiatives and 'bottom down' healing process that happened in places like the Glencree Centre and the WAVE counselling groups, and initiatives and processes that played a significant role in stabilising the situation immediately after the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in 1998. These initiatives happened in the absence of any top-down 'official' legacy architecture similar to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

The post-violence phase of a peace process comes after ceasefire and a comprehensive negotiated settlement between the conflicting parties that resolves most underlying issues in the conflict (see Figure 1). The political challenge is to fully implement the accord and achieve the transformation of the conflict, eventually leading in the long term to a sustainable peace. As Northern Ireland is discovering, this phase is likely to take longer than the thirty years of the conflict itself. Yet in world terms, GFA has done well when compared to the collapse within five years of the majority of peace agreements according to the Peace Accords Matrix (Joshi et al. 2015; Darby and McGinty 2003). A resilient and lasting agreement needs considerable high-level political stability and external support to achieve both horizontal and vertical integration between the security, economic and social tasks listed from A to E. Viewing a peace process from a sociology perspective, John Brewer (2010, 200) is emphatic that once violence has been switched off, there must be a social peace space for not only rebuilding social capacity but also the repair and rebuilding of social and communal relationships between former enemies. Normally called 'Dealing with the Past', task E in Figure 1 adopts the term 'Making peace with the Past' (Dawson 2007). It seeks to address the emotional healing of past wounds and the active involvement of former combatants in building the new shared nation. Without it, there is the risk of renewed communal violence and the transfer of the unprocessed pain into the next generation.

### The multi-track peacebuilding pyramid

Another perspective is the peacebuilding pyramid devised by John Paul Lederach (1997, 39) to describe the top, middle and bottom layers of a peace process. Lederach shifted



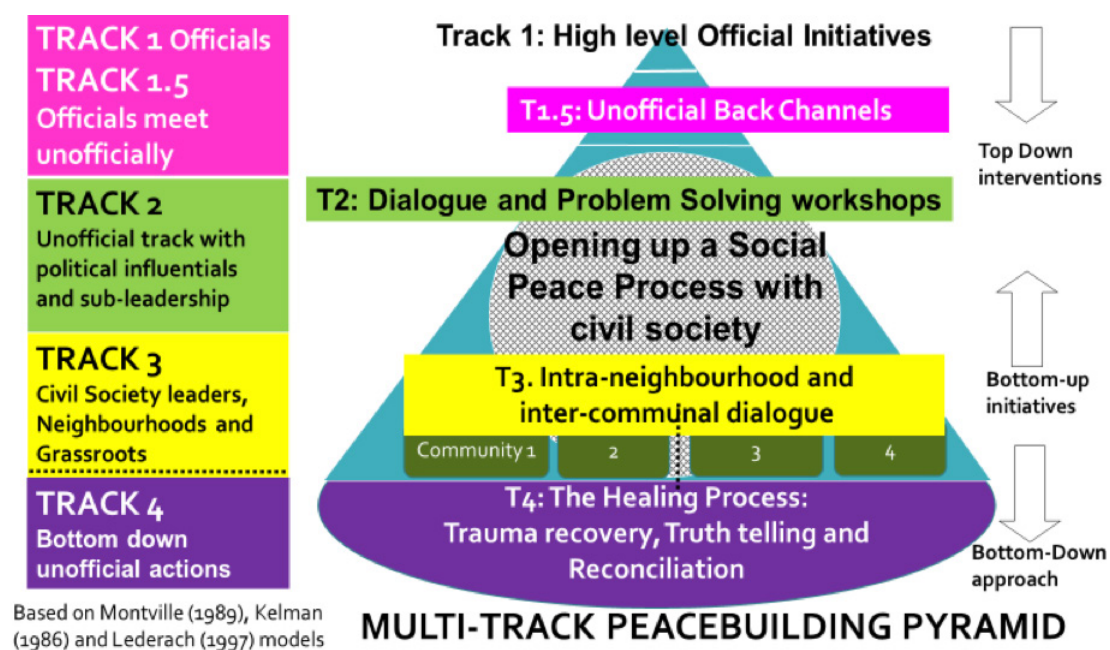
*Figure 1: The post-violence phase of a peace process embracing five major tasks to be integrated through political leadership.*



the focus away from the top-level elite leadership to acknowledge the significant role that bottom-up interventions play in underpinning a comprehensive and sustainable peace process. Over the last twenty-five years, the pyramid has evolved into a multi-track model and Figure 2 illustrates where the state of conflict transformation theory has now arrived. This paper proposes the inclusion of a new Track Four to capture the special nature of the post-violence healing process.

The origins of the pyramid go back to the term 'Track One diplomacy' devised by Joseph Montville (1986), to describe the official inter-state diplomacy in which he was involved himself – sometimes public, most times hidden. But it was in his creation of the term 'Track Two', separate and below Track One, that gave status and meaning to the powerful role that unofficial leaders can play in building blocks of peace and mending fractured relationships within and between states. John Burton (1990) and Herbert Kelman (2003) built on this concept and the language changed from diplomacy to peacebuilding. They pioneered Track Two problem-solving workshops to demonstrate how intensive residential conflict analysis sessions with politicians can change perspectives and protracted conflictual relationships.

Track One and a Half peacemaking emerged as a concept fitting somewhere in between the official diplomacy at Track One and the unofficial dialogues at Track Two (Mapendere 2008). They are unofficial officials meeting for discreet secret conversations in the back channels like the Derry businessman Brendan Duddy who acted as a 'go-between' connecting the IRA with MI6 (Aveyard 2016).



*Figure 2: The peacebuilding pyramid shows the multiple peacemaking tracks that have evolved over the past twenty years*

Track Three is a more recent term to describe bottom-up initiatives to build social capacity in divided societies and involve 'ordinary people' and local communities directly affected by the conflict. It includes 'a dense array of grass roots groups, enlightened persons, cultural minorities, networks and popular movements' who may only have a 'marginal clout on decision-making power but yet are able to generate momentum and pressure from below to deal with specific local issues (Wasike et al. 2016). Often unpaid volunteers, these groups are best at giving a human face to the 'other' through people-to-people dialogue activities across estranged and hostile neighbourhoods.

At first glance, the bottom-up activities of Track 3 would seem to be where the healing of past wounds fits in. However, my proposition is that it constitutes a qualitatively different kind of peace work requiring special psycho-social skills to work with trauma and to transform the dark episodes of the past. It seeks to prevent the heavy weight of history and toxic narratives of the past from determining the future. By adding on Track Four to capture the undercurrents of the peacebuilding pyramid, it addresses outstanding questions about the complexity and dynamics of the post-violence remembering and healing process:

- How do we remember and process the lived experience of violence and injustice of the past (Lundy and McGovern, 2008)?
- How are truth telling by victims, attempts to obtain official truth and achieving a sense of justice all linked together?
- Or do people simply want to move on and forget about what happened so as to create a new future-oriented social cohesion?

Figure 3 plots the four social responses to the violence of the past on a bell curve. The failure of having any agreed legacy architecture means that victims can find themselves isolated and abandoned on the left-hand side. Track 4 activities have the power to acknowledge past hurts so that people do not feel trapped in the undercurrents of painful memories.

### **Track One: official efforts to work on the past**

There has been much dissatisfaction within the victim/survivor community in Ireland that no explicit legal mechanism for truth recovery was made in the Belfast Good Friday Agreement (GFA 1998). Under pressure from the Women's Coalition, three paragraphs 11–13 were included in the final GFA text: 'to acknowledge and address the suffering of the victims of violence as a necessary element of reconciliation.' However, the reality of those last four days (7–10th April) of around-the-clock negotiations at Castle Buildings in Stormont was that victims were not organised sufficiently at the high level to get legacy

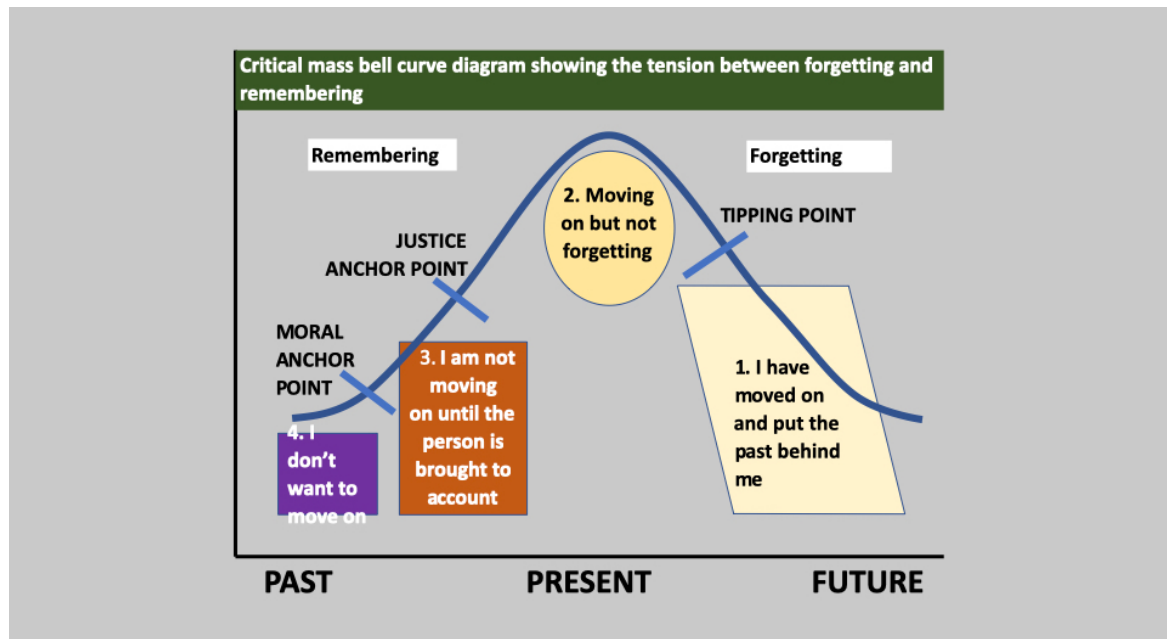


Figure 3: Four responses to past violence plotted on a bell curve

issues onto the GFA agenda. Unfortunately, the report on the needs of victims by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, entitled 'We Will Remember Them', arrived one month later and was too late to be considered. Taoiseach Bertie Ahern (2019) recalls floating the idea of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) among parties in the Stormont negotiations but to his surprise found much resistance from the unionist parties, who saw it as a republican Trojan Horse. Having heard about the TRC project from a South African delegation in 1996, he was disappointed it was a no-go area.

It would be wrong to convey the impression that nothing happened in the absence of a TRC at Track One official level. Appendix 1 lists the substantial number of public inquiries, inquests, and investigations. When all these four types of actions are taken into account, they amount to substantial official Track One activity and involve a significant amount of funding from the UK State, probably around £2 billion and close to what a TRC would have cost. It turned out to be a pragmatic approach by the two governments made on the hoof as they went along.

#### Track Four: unofficial efforts to provide a healing process

Following the 1994 ceasefires, community-based initiatives by victim support groups emerged to find their voice, make meaning of the violence and discern the lived connection between past and present. Getting the truth about what happened in past specific incidents of violence also served as a catalyst for their own healing. Snapshots of significant interventions are given in Appendix 2.

Coming in the aftermath of GFA, amidst the excitement and hope of a new era of

peace, the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation set up four projects in an organic way, one after the other. They offered a confidential, safe weekend residential space at Glencree to victim/survivors and former combatants from NI and Britain. In retrospect, these four projects are effective examples of not just 'peacebuilding from below' carried on quietly in the background, but also a 'bottom-down' approach, the hallmark of Track Four. The process involved peer storytelling, group circles using the 'talking stone', trauma support and nature-based journey trails to enable victims/survivors to recover their own voice, achieve self-awareness and move towards as much 'emotional closure' as possible.

The first project was LIVE (Let's Involve the Victim's Experience) for victim/survivors, which started in late 1998 and ran until 2008. Then came the former combatants project (2002–8) in similar residential weekends following the release of political prisoners in 2000. Arising from these separate weekends, participants from the two projects volunteered to engage each other in informal victim-combatant dialogue encounters. The fourth project was the Sustainable Peace Network (2004–2009), an eco-therapy initiative for both victim/survivors and former combatants who journeyed together in the wilderness mountains of Scotland and South Africa. The four different innovative projects could not have happened without financial support from the American Irish philanthropist Chuck Feeney and the EU peace funds.

What is meant by a bottom-down process? It may seem a bit Freudian, but we have to find ways of working with the trapped emotional memory, both personal and collective, that lies under the surface. Emotional time is different to ordinary time because it feels like the conflict event only happened yesterday. Volkan (2014) calls this a 'time collapse'. Dawson (2007) calls it the 'present past'. No one should underestimate the impact of thirty years of political violence on NI civil society and the extent to which each community has been traumatised by the bitter inter-communal war. Much of that remains buried as an unhealed undercurrent that nobody wants to talk about, yet it continues to drive sectarianism.

The silent deep-rooted fears of the 'other' also resides in this basement area. For some it remains the underbelly of the conflict and is not allowed psychologically or politically to appear on the radar. Of course, we must accept that many people fear opening the Pandora's Box because of our lack of emotional capacity to work with unprocessed deep hurt and unresolved trauma. Add to that the big political and official security need to deny things that happened in the past and to block attempts to reveal secrets of the dirty war (Cobain 2016, 169–209). Yet it is no longer productive to keep holding it underground below the surface if we want to transform the conflict.

The big breakthrough in working with trauma was the book *Trauma and Recovery* by Judith Herman (1992), based on her work with victims of violence in Boston. She showed that the path out of interior silence was to tell your story to others. Usually, that

does not happen until a person can find a ripe and safe moment. For RUC officers and British soldiers, it can take several years after retirement before that moment arrives, if it comes at all. For victims who have lost loved ones, it was not until after GFA that they could feel safe to talk about things. Figure 4 (Corry 2013) shows Herman's three stages in the journey. It cannot occur in isolation. Connection with others in stage 2 is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of human dignity and a meaningful world.

Three working principles form the heart of the bottom-down healing process.

A. **Trauma is an emotional injury and not a disorder.** It has not been helpful that psychologists have overused the term PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) to describe trauma as a disorder, a term that should be reserved for prolonged and repeated emotional abuse. This creates the impression that disorder is some kind of clinical disability that can only be managed through drugs. Instead, as an emotional injury, it can be healed through a social process of storytelling and truth recovery based on 'working through' the indescribable and the undiscussable (Peter Levine 2010; Daniel Bar-On 1999), as visualised in Figure 4.

B. **Making meaning out of suffering is essential.** Viktor Frankl (1964), the Auschwitz survivor, turned his gloomy predicament and human suffering into a personal growth experience: 'When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves'. Nelson Mandela survived a similar ordeal in his Robben Island prison cell to rethink the use of violence. Such journeys affirm the defiant power of the human spirit to re-invent itself.

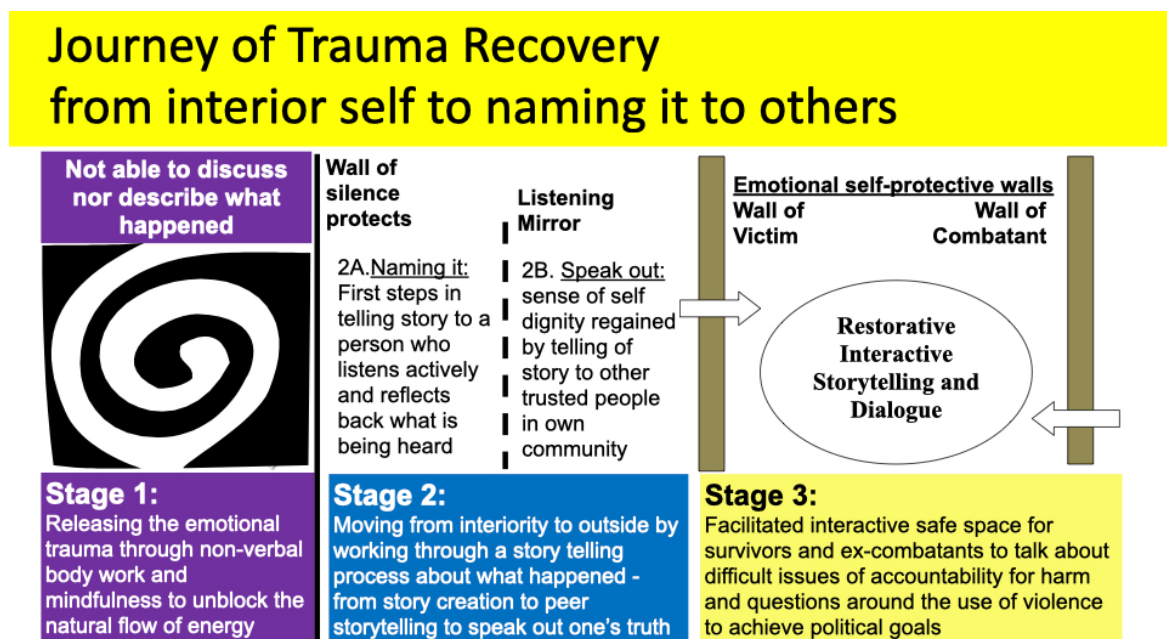


Figure 4: Judith Herman's three stage journey of trauma recovery from silence, through storytelling to re-connection with others



**C. Hearing and acknowledging the hurt of each other in the storytelling process is the door opener to experience the 'humanising moment'.** To be respected, heard, understood and acknowledged are all vital steps in the healing process. Carl Rogers (1977) pioneered non-directive storytelling: 'To my mind, empathy is in itself a healing agent...because it brings even the most frightened client into the human race. If a person is understood, he or she belongs.' The humanising moment happens in an interactive experience between victim and ex-combatant when each enters into the other's lived experience. It is instinctively experienced as heart touching and connects to the gut. New understandings emerge about the human cost of violence and the context within which people got drawn into conflict.

For Glencree participants, using the peer storytelling method, it was not some kind of clinical professional workshop but an interactive peer healing and social experience. Victims expressed the painful lived experience of the past in the presence of a listener and then roles were reversed with a fellow victim. It was not for everyone, but those who came back to successive weekends could feel the melting of their inner trauma, releasing them from the grip of the past with renewed dignity and making the breakthrough into new life experiences. They moved out of the shadows of Track Four and surfaced up into Track Three community life, taking on active peacemaking roles.

### **Deconstructing toxic binary narratives**

Many senior ex-combatants attended the Glencree workshops and are testament to the fact that only 2 percent of released prisoners broke their licence and re-offended. Part of their post-violence journey was to come to terms with how loyalist and republican narratives were mobilised and weaponised in their respective campaigns of violence during the Troubles. Rotberg (2006, vii) reminds us that: 'Every conflict is justified by a narrative of grievance, accusation and indignity.' The Irish experience mirrors that. Each narrative holds the unresolved collective hurt and grievance of that nation or community when told and retold from father/mother to son/daughter.

The loyalist historian Philip Orr has spoken about how the loyalist and republican narratives are binary opposites connected side by side. They are parallel, interdependent and equal but interlocked in complex ways because of their shared historical yet contested experience on the island of Ireland. He questioned whether we have to stay in the binary route. Is it possible to see the bigger picture of the two opposing narratives in relationship to each other and not excluding the other? Dan Bar-On and Sami Adwan (2006, 205) have proposed the metaphor of the double helix because the two narratives are intertwined and yet, 'they are still separate and should be acknowledged as such' They are not touching but live in both constructive and unproductive tension with each other.

A number of former combatants, both in the time they spent in prison and in

subsequent workshops, have bravely faced the issue of the futility of violence and deconstructed the toxicity they were taught through the green and orange narratives. In the profound words of Mahatma Gandhi: 'Violence seems to change things but eventually violence takes you over'. The task of unravelling the virus of political violence surfaced at times in the intense encounters between victims and ex-combatants as they faced each other in reflective mode. It takes time for such re-thinking to happen and particularly to share it in public because it puts ex-combatants in the vulnerable position of questioning 'the cause' for which their fellow comrades gave their lives in combat. They were beholden to 'the cause' taken on by previous martyrs. When Pat Magee (IRA) got to make that point in his face-to-face meeting with victim/survivor Jo Berry (2017, 337), Jo was about to give up; but then 'something happened about halfway through where he stopped talking and said to me: "... When I hear your anger and your grief, and [then he asked the question] what can I do to help?" In that moment, he had taken off his political hat, he had opened up and became vulnerable.' A new journey started for both that has continued for many years.

Indeed, it is not too late for some form of legacy commission at the high level to support further informal Track Four rounds of healing past hurts, trauma recovery and the huge issue of re-thinking how political violence was used in the past by each ethno-political community.

## Endnotes

1. The term 'post-conflict' is not used because both positive/productive and negative/unproductive conflict is always with us. The challenge is to achieve the ending of political violence through a ceasefire. The unilateral ceasefires of the IRA (31st August) and the Combined Loyalist Military Command (13th October) opened the post-violence era in the autumn of 1994. However, it did not bring about the ending of sectarian abuse and attacks.
2. Ahern made these remarks at the Royal Irish Academy in an address to mark the retirement of Professor Jennifer Todd from UCD on 23rd November 2018.
3. Address made by Philip Orr at a Glencree seminar at Liberty Hall, 3rd December 2015.

## References

Aveyard, S. C. 2016. *No Solution: The Labour Government and the Northern Ireland Conflict 1974–79*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Bar-On, Dan. 1999. *The Indescribable and the Undiscussable: Reconstructing Human Discourse After Trauma*. Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press.

Bar-On, Dan and Sami Adwan. 2006. 'The psychology of better dialogue between two separate but interdependent narratives'. In *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict: History's Double Helix*, edited by Robert Rothberg. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Berry, Jo. 2017. 'I'd find a way to contribute to peace'. In *The Northern Ireland Troubles in Britain: Impacts, Engagements, Legacies and Memories*, (edited by Graham Dawson, Jo Dover and Stephen Hopkins, 334–341. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Bloomfield, Kenneth. 1998. *We will remember them: Report of the Northern Ireland Victims Commissioner* <http://www.nio.gov.uk/bloomfield.pdf>

Boraine, Alex. 2000. *A Country Unmasked – Inside South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. Oxford University Press.

Brewer, John D.. 2010. *Peace Processes: A Sociological Approach*. Cambridge: Polity.

Burton, John. 1990. *Conflict: Resolution and* , London: Macmillan.

Corry, Geoffrey. 2013. 'Finding Meaning: Melting the Stone in Relational Disputes' (Chapter 12). In *The Choreography of Resolution: Conflict, Movement and Neuroscience*, edited by Michelle LeBaron, Carrie MacLeod and Andrew Floyer, 179–196. Chicago: American Bar Association.

Corry, Geoffrey. 2020A. 'When the steel shutter melts: The over of acknowledgement within a relational justice process'. In *More Justice, More Peace: When Peacemakers are Advocates*, edited by Susanne Terry. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

Corry, Geoffrey. 2020B. 'The Glencree Workshops (1998–2008) in the Post-Violence Phase of the NI Peace Process'. Unpublished paper.

Dalton, Tim. 2020. 'Putting Arms Beyond Use'. In *Inside Accounts, Volume II: The Irish Government and Peace in Northern Ireland, from the Good Friday Agreement to the Fall of Power-Sharing*, edited by Graham Spencer, 142–174. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

## References

Darby, John and Roger McGinty. 2003. 'Coming out of Violence: A Comparative Study of Peace Processes'. In *Researching the Troubles: Social Science Perspectives on the Northern Ireland Conflict*, 273–288. Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing.

Dawson, Graham. 2007. *Making Peace with the Past: Memory, Trauma and the Irish Troubles*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Frankl, Viktor E. 1964. *Man's Search for Meaning*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Herman, Judith. 1997. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence: from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic books

## Appendix 1

### TRACK ONE OFFICIAL INITIATIVES

- Lord Saville's exhaustive and expensive inquiry (1997-2010) on the Bloody Sunday killings of January 1972 believed to have cost £400 million, even though the official amount is stated as £200 million. In his own words, prime minister Tony Blair said (2010:165): "It had been worth it: an exhaustive and fair account of what happened."
- A number of police inquiries led by Sir John Stevens (2003) concerning collusion between loyalist paramilitaries and the state security forces.
- The review by the Canadian judge Peter Cory (2005) on six disputed killings, set up at Weston Park (2001).
- The Irish government commissioned Judge Peter Smithwick Inquiry (2005-11) to carry out a public inquiry on the deaths of two RUC chiefs Breen and Buchanan at the border in 1989.
- Sir Desmond de Silva's review (2012) of the case papers on Pat Finucane's killing in 1985;
- Lord Robin Eames and Denis Bradley, Report of the Consultative Group on the Past, Commission appointed by the Northern Ireland Secretary of State (2009), [www.cgpnri.org](http://www.cgpnri.org)
- Richard Haass and Megan O'Sullivan, Proposed agreement among the parties of the Northern Ireland Executive on Parades, Select Commemorations and Related Protests; Flags and Emblems; and Contending with the Past. 31 December 2013
- The investigations into unsolved murders between the years 1969-98 in chronological order was carried out by the Historical Enquiries Team (2006-2014) or the HET by which it became known, established by Sir Hugh Orde when he was Chief Commissioner with the PSNI. It was unable to complete its task before the project was suspended in 2014.
- The investigations carried out by the Police Ombudsman office (PONI), the most notable being the reports on killings in North Belfast and at the Height's Bar in Loughinisland, Co Down.
- Operation Kenova, an investigation by former Chief Constable John Boucher into the activities of the double agent Stakeknife, ongoing at present.



## Appendix 2

### TRACK FOUR UNOFFICIAL INITIATIVES

- Widows who had lost their husbands/partners in the Troubles found their voice in WAVE (1991) counselling groups. Their logo of a lighthouse became a beacon of light for those able to process their trauma and bereavement. The group went from strength to strength setting up a network of counselling centres around the province with sustained support backed by the Victim Unit funds.
- An Crann/The Tree (1994-2004) provided a space for people to tell their story through different art forms as part of a healing process. Separately, in Derry, victim/survivors set up the Theatre of Witness to tell their individual story as a 'story drama'.
- When the Ballymurphy victims called a meeting in late 1998, they suddenly found their individual voices - silent for so many years when grief was suspended – and were surprised of their collective need to get answers to many unresolved questions over what happened in their community in the days after the introduction of internment in August 1971. This started a long journey for them to request an official inquiry into the killings of civilians by the Parachute Regiment. By trawling through the national archives, they uncovered a lot of facts which prepared them for eventually the year-long inquest 2018-19.
- In England, the Warrington Peace Centre was formed by Colin and Wendy Parry following the death of their little boy, Tim (12), in the bomb placed in a litter bin by the IRA on Bridge Street in Warrington in 1973. In response, Susan McHugh led a 'pop up' protest through the streets of Dublin with the simple message: End the Violence.
- When Don Mullin (1997) published his book containing one hundred eyewitness accounts of the shootings on Bloody Sunday back in January 1972, it revived the deep contrast with the findings of the Widgery Report (1972) that victims had experienced at that time. Following the publication, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern raised the matter with prime minister Tony Blair in London to acknowledge the continued hurt. To his credit, Blair ordered a public inquiry to build a positive political atmosphere for the Stormont talks.
- Healing through Remembering was a project established in 2000 by leading civil society 'influentials' with the support of the Victims Unit to find ways to remember and memorialise people's personal accounts of the conflict rather than the traditional manner of erecting monuments to the past. It continued to support storytelling as a healing mechanism. Healing Through Remembering, (2002) The Report of the Healing Through Remembering Project, <http://www.healingthroughremembering.org/pdf/htrreport.pdf>

- The Ardoyne Commemoration Project (ACP) was a community-based approach to archiving and publishing testimonies from people in the community who lived through the conflict. The book was the product of four years' discussions, interviewing and editing of the stories of the 99 people from Ardoyne in North Belfast who lost their lives as a result of the political violence between 1969 and 1998.
- In Fermanagh, SEFF was formed to work with 'innocent victims' and mainly Protestant unionist families who suffered over many years from the killing activities of IRA units in the rural borderlands.

# THE CHURCHES, RECONCILIATION AND ADDRESSING THE LEGACY OF INTER-COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Gladys Ganiel and Nicola Brady



# THE CHURCHES, RECONCILIATION AND ADDRESSING THE LEGACY OF INTERCOMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

## Abstract

This article explores the role of churches in Northern Ireland since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, focusing on their efforts to promote reconciliation and address the legacy of intercommunal violence. The first part analyses initiatives that took place between 1998 and 2015, including the Methodist Church's Edgehill Reconciliation Programme, the Church of Ireland's Hard Gospel project, the Presbyterian Church's Peacebuilding Programme, and the Irish Churches Peace Project. It argues that their effectiveness was limited by a lack of financial investment by the churches themselves and by insufficient communication with their own grassroots. The second part analyses two post-2015 initiatives that attempt to address the limitations of previous projects: The Church Leaders' civil society dialogue initiative and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's 'Considering Grace' project. The Church Leaders' initiative is potentially strengthening the churches' collective voice on key issues, as it moves beyond joint statements to facilitating public dialogues. Considering Grace is attempting to address the communications failures of prior projects through a grassroots-level, facilitated dialogue on the legacy of intercommunal violence, framed around the concept of 'gracious remembering'. It is too soon to evaluate the long-term impact of these initiatives. But it is significant that both have prioritised facilitated dialogue as a means to promoting reconciliation and addressing the legacy of intercommunal violence.

**KEYWORDS:** *Churches, reconciliation, dialogue, legacy/dealing with the past, Northern Ireland.*

## Introduction

More than two decades after the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), Northern Ireland remains a very fractured society. Across political and civic leadership there has been a failure to engage fully with the opportunities offered by the peace process to heal societal divisions. Given the extent that religious identity has been intertwined with conflicting national identities and the social structures of segregated communities (Ganiel 2016a), the churches have faced calls from within and beyond their membership for greater leadership on reconciliation and addressing the legacy of intercommunal violence. In this article, we analyse churches' work in these areas since the Agreement.

In the first part, we consider the period between 1998–2015, examining a range of initiatives at denominational and inter-church levels. We argue that their effectiveness was limited by a lack of financial investment by the churches themselves and by

insufficient communication with their own grassroots. In the second part, we discuss these projects' relationship to two post-2015 initiatives: the Church Leaders' civil society dialogue initiative and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's 'Considering Grace' project. The Church Leaders' civil society dialogue initiative marked a new approach to peacebuilding from the island's inter-church structures, while Considering Grace is the most extensive legacy project attempted by any faith-based group on the island. We argue that in different ways, the Church Leaders' initiative and Considering Grace project address the shortcomings of previous contributions. The Church Leaders' initiative modelled a streamlining and potential strengthening of the churches' collective voice on key issues, moving beyond joint statements to facilitating public dialogues. The Considering Grace project recognises the communications failures of previous initiatives. It addresses this through a grassroots level, facilitated dialogue on the legacy of intercommunal violence, framed around the concept of 'gracious remembering'. While it is still too soon to draw definitive conclusions about the long-term impact of these initiatives, it is significant that both have placed facilitated dialogue at their core.

As a caveat before proceeding, we confess that both of us are deeply involved in the projects we describe: Brady as General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches and Ganiel as the principal researcher on Considering Grace. While our involvement undoubtedly affects our enthusiasm, we invite readers to judge our conclusions based on the evidence we provide.

### **Churches, reconciliation and the legacy of intercommunal violence, 1998–2015**

Throughout the Troubles, a range of churches, faith-based groups and individual faith leaders engaged in peacemaking, facilitating secret dialogues and creating public inter-church initiatives (Brewer et al. 2011; Wells 2010). Sandal (2017, 116–17) suggests that, in the wake of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, churches increased their engagement in conflict transformation by taking part in consultations with political leaders and paramilitaries. High-profile demonstrations of outreach by church leaders across traditional community divides, like the meeting of the Catholic Primate Cardinal Seán Brady with Democratic Unionist Party Leader Reverend Ian Paisley, undoubtedly had wider impact (Barnett 2006). Yet this and similar initiatives, including joint statements by the churches, could be dismissed as 'speechifying', lacking deep or long-lasting impact (Brewer et al. 2011, 31–32). Contrary to Sandal, Ganiel and Brewer (2018) suggested that churches retreated from peacebuilding after the Agreement, noting a reduction of grassroots reconciliation activity. They argued that a disconnect between initiatives at denominational, leadership level and local congregations limited institutional learning and militated against whole-church strategic commitments to reconciliation.

During this period, the three largest Protestant denominations developed dedicated peacebuilding programmes. The first and longest-running was the Methodist



Church's Edgehill Reconciliation Programme (2004–2014), based at its theological college in Belfast. It worked with young offenders, loyalists/republicans, and minority ethnic communities; and offered a joint theology degree with the Catholic Mater Dei Institute. The Church of Ireland and Presbyterian Church both established three-year, denomination-wide initiatives launched in 2005 and 2006, respectively. Both the Church of Ireland's 'Hard Gospel' project and the Presbyterian Church's 'Peacebuilding Programme' sought to equip their local congregations to engage in reflection and dialogue about the causes and consequences of societal division and take action by reaching out and forming partnerships. Despite positive outcomes reported by participating congregations, the initiatives were discontinued when external funding ceased, rather than being integrated into the church structures in a lasting way. There is also evidence that the programmes appealed to people who were already enthusiastic about peacebuilding, rather than stimulating more people in the churches to become involved (Ganiel 2021). The Catholic Church did not establish comparable initiatives, although there was significant activity through the Clonard Peace and Reconciliation Mission, established during this time by Redemptorist priest, Fr Gerry Reynolds (d. 2015) in Belfast (Ganiel 2019); and the ongoing work of the Irish School of Ecumenics, which was founded in 1970 by Jesuit priest, Fr Michael Hurley (d. 2011). Both initiatives remain active.

A similar disconnect between leadership and local level limited the wider societal impact of the high-level dialogue taking place in the national inter-church structures: the Irish Council of Churches (ICC) — whose membership comprised Protestant, independent and Orthodox churches — and the Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM), which brought together representatives of the ICC and the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference. Power (2008) attributed some of the limitations to the lack of agreement about whether ecumenical dialogue should be purely theological and working towards church unity, or partly theological and partly social. While a certain fluidity in interpretation may have helped keep people round the table, Power concluded that this was a barrier to action and resulted in a separation of theological ecumenism from community relations, underlined by the establishment of two separate departments of the IICM — Social Issues and Theology. There was no mechanism to disseminate the learning from this work to local level. While local inter-church forums existed in many parts of Northern Ireland, these were not formally connected to church structures (Power 2006; Ganiel 2016b, 192–209). In addition, reconciliation and addressing the legacy of intercommunal violence were only part of the ICC/IICM remit. Unlike the denominational programmes, these ecumenical bodies addressed a number of concerns beyond these issues.

In 2012, the Church of Ireland, Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist churches, together with the ICC, secured funding from the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) under its Peace III Programme for the Irish Churches Peace Project, a peacebuilding programme that operated at both the leadership and local levels. McDowell (2021) explains that the centrepiece of the project was the provision of support in the form of a Good Relations

Officer in six target areas where there was little evidence of cooperation between local churches. The project was overseen by a Steering Committee that included senior clergy and senior executives of participating churches, and the thirty-one categories of target outcomes agreed with the funders included strands aimed at church leadership. Some of the tensions noted by Power in her analysis of the national inter-church structures continued as McDowell (2021) highlights 'an ongoing and unresolved tension as to whether the project should be primarily considered from a community development or a community relations perspective'. For example, the priority placed on reconciliation and dealing with the past varied across the target areas. This meant the project faced the same challenge Power identified in the earlier work of the ICC/IICM; ambiguity as a barrier to action. However, target outcomes were fully achieved in all but four areas and exceeded in eight strands. For McDowell, this underlines the importance of structural support to equip local congregations for peacebuilding.

But like the earlier denominational initiatives, these support structures did not continue when the funding ended in 2015. Ultimately, the effectiveness of all these programmes was limited by a lack of financial investment by the churches themselves and by insufficient communication with their own grassroots. But some people in the churches learned from these limitations. For example, at an inter-church level, McDowell notes that lessons and connections from the Irish Churches Peace Project transferred to the work of the ICC and IICM, leading to structural reform and new initiatives. That year the IICM was reformed to replace the two separate departments for Theology and Social Issues with a more flexible model of working groups, thereby eliminating the problematic division noted by Power. The meetings of the Four Church Leaders — the Catholic and Church of Ireland Archbishops of Armagh, together with the Presbyterian Moderator and Methodist President — were expanded to include the President of the ICC, becoming the Church Leaders (Ireland) Group (McCullagh 2016). At a denominational level, at its 2016 General Assembly the Presbyterian Church unveiled a 'Vision for Society' statement that prioritised peacebuilding and the creation of a reconciled community. Its 'dealing with the past' task group also announced a major research project, which would later become known as Considering Grace. Considering Grace is the most extensive denomination-wide initiative to focus primarily on dealing with the legacy of intercommunal violence. It is also taking specific steps to address gaps in communication between leadership and the grassroots.

### **Churches, reconciliation and the legacy of intercommunal violence, 2015-onwards**

The strengthening of the Church Leaders Group's connection to the national inter-church structures, described above, allowed for greater integration of this work with the wider network of relationships managed by ICC and IICM. The Church Leaders Group also began to move beyond the 'speechifying' critiqued by Brewer et al. (2011) to facilitating political and civic dialogues. This included a series of public statements on reconciliation and the need for political stability in Northern Ireland. A consultation

with faith-based charities in September 2015 resulted in a joint statement entitled 'Instability is erasing hope from people's lives' (Moriarty 2015) and a further statement welcoming the 'Fresh Start' agreement that was reached later that year (Taylor 2015). Behind the scenes, the Church Leaders Group had been meeting with representatives of the individual political parties to share concerns arising from the pastoral experience of local churches and encourage politicians in the negotiations.

When the institutions collapsed again in January 2017, the Church Leaders Group undertook a consultation with local churches and faith-based charities and later shared these concerns with political leaders and the media (Breen 2017). By September 2018, negotiations for the restoration of the devolved administration were in a state of long-standing paralysis. The Church Leaders Group took the initiative to invite the leaders of the five largest political parties to a joint meeting in the headquarters of the Presbyterian Church in Belfast. It was the first time party leaders had been in the same room in eight months. This was followed by meetings with the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Tánaiste and Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs the following month.

Church leaders asked how they could support efforts to restore the institutions. Party leaders replied that the invitation to this type of dialogue might be extended to other groups of elected representatives since, in the absence of the institutions, the spaces in which cross-party groups could reflect together on societal challenges had been significantly restricted. The Church Leaders Group designed a proposal, with the support of the Community Relations Council Northern Ireland, for four regional dialogue events which brought together approximately 120 civil society representatives, with a cross-party panel of elected representatives, between December 2018 and February 2019. Two representatives of the Church Leaders Group chaired each of the regional events, but the role of local churches was supported with local church leaders recruited to act as facilitators of the round table discussions. A report of the findings, 'A Time for Courageous and Compassionate Leadership' was presented to the party leaders, together with the Secretary of State and Tánaiste, during the next round of negotiations in May 2019 (Church Leaders (Ireland) Group 2019).

We cannot offer definitive conclusions on the role that the Church Leaders' civil society dialogue initiative played in helping restart the political process and in reminding political leaders of the need to promote reconciliation and address the legacy of the past. But through this initiative, the role of the churches was evolving from one in which individual denominations contributed as participants in significant consultations, as described by Sandal, to a more proactive contribution in which they collectively took the initiative to facilitate dialogue on the unfinished work of peace, and attempted to shape the tone of wider public conversation.

## Considering Grace

Considering Grace is an ongoing project of the Presbyterian Church. It was conceived by the Church's Council for Public Affairs 'Dealing with the Past' task group, whose motion for a research project involving interviews with 100 Presbyterians was passed at the 2016 General Assembly. The project was in part a response to the 2014 Stormont House Agreement proposals on dealing with the past, which encouraged communities to gather stories. From the task group's point of view, the effort to gather stories reflected the idea that sharing stories could promote healing and forgiveness within the church's own congregations; and help the church contribute to wider discussion on the legacy of intercommunal violence. The task group was also motivated by a sense that the church's previous peacebuilding projects had not connected adequately with grassroots Christians, in part because the stories of many people who had served and suffered during the Troubles had not been adequately acknowledged by the church or wider society. From the start, the project was designed to appeal to a wider grassroots base than had been engaged by the denomination's previous peacebuilding programme, through the very effort to gather those untold stories.

But in line with previous denominational initiatives, there was no commitment from the church itself to fund the project, which raised questions about where addressing the legacy of intercommunal violence was situated within the church's priorities. Funding was finally secured from the Irish Government's Reconciliation Fund, in partnership with Queen's University. It covered the employment of Jamie Yohanis, who worked alongside Gladys Ganiel at Queen's, conducting and transcribing interviews. The Queen's researchers and the task group, which included serving and retired clergy and laity, identified categories of interviewees: clergy, victims, security force personnel, emergency responders, health care workers, grassroots peacemakers, politicians, those affected by loyalist paramilitarism, those who left Presbyterianism, and 'critical friends' from outside the denomination. Altogether 122 people were interviewed (including 50 women and 77 from border counties).

So far, the primary output of the project has been a book written for a popular audience, *Considering Grace: Presbyterians and the Troubles* (Ganiel and Yohanis 2019). *Considering Grace* is primarily a book of stories, presented as far as possible in people's own words. The concluding chapter advances the idea of a 'gracious remembering' that ponders the human cost of violence, gives victims a public voice, is self-critical about their own and their communities' actions, and listens to alternative perspectives and interpretations of the past (Ganiel and Yohanis 2019, 242–43). But the task group recognised that a book, in and of itself, is of limited impact. So, Dave Thompson was employed to produce study resources based on the book for congregations/small groups and for trainee ministers (Presbyterian Church in Ireland 2020). The resources are the product of focus groups facilitated by Thompson in six different locations throughout Northern Ireland. Most groups met over three evenings and discussed materials and questions from the then-unpublished *Considering Grace*. The resources are organised

around the themes that emerged from the focus groups: lamenting, ministering, remembering, praying, forgiving, seeking a more reconciled community, and challenges to the church. The grounding of the resources in the focus groups was a conscious effort to avoid a 'top-down' denominational initiative on dealing with the past. It is hoped that grassroots Christians will use the prompts in the resources to facilitate dialogue and shape their own responses to addressing the legacy of intercommunal violence, appropriate to their local contexts. The funding for Thompson's work and the production of the resources came from an anonymous donor. But the church has invested in promoting the book and resources, organising five regional book launches in November 2019 and a half-day conference on 'Considering Grace: Unpacking the Impact', which was scheduled for March 2020. The conference and dissemination of the resources were postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but work will resume when conditions allow.

## Conclusion

Despite a range of denominational and inter-church initiatives in the years after the Good Friday Agreement, it has been argued that churches 'are missing their opportunity to help build peace in Northern Ireland' (Ganiel and Brewer 2018). The main limitations of these initiatives were a lack of financial investment by the churches themselves and inadequate communication with their own grassroots.

Yet two recent initiatives – both of which emphasise the importance of facilitated dialogue – indicate that churches may be learning from the limitations of their previous efforts. The Church Leaders' civil society dialogue initiative saw the churches moving beyond joint statements, which have limited impact, to facilitating public dialogues with political and civic leaders. Having said that, it is likely that grassroots Christians of most denominations remain relatively unaware of the activities of the Church Leaders Group. Others, including a significant subset of conservative evangelicals within Protestant denominations, might even oppose this inter-denominational cooperation (Ganiel 2016a; Brewer et al. 2011). At the same time, the Presbyterian Church's Considering Grace project has recognised the failure of previous initiatives to facilitate communication between denominational leadership and the grassroots. It directly addressed this by using grassroots, facilitated dialogue to produce study resources based on the project. Facilitated dialogue will remain at the project's core going forward. In addition, the themes explored in the resources, particularly around pastoral care and lament, will perhaps be even magnified by bereavements during the pandemic. At the same time, Considering Grace has relied on external funding. As with previous church-based peacebuilding projects, this raises questions about the Presbyterian Church's commitment.

In sum, it is significant that both the Church Leaders' civil society dialogue initiative and Considering Grace build on previous peacebuilding efforts, attempting to address



their shortcomings. And both initiatives have made facilitated dialogue central to their work, signaling its importance as a methodology for promoting reconciliation and addressing the legacy of intercommunal violence. The long-term impact of these initiatives remains uncertain, but at the very least, in these cases the churches are showing signs of learning from the limitations of their own past efforts.

**Acknowledgements**

We wish to thank Rev. Tony Davidson for comments on an earlier draft.

## References

Barnett, Louisa and PA. 2006. 'Paisley meets Catholic Church in groundbreaking talks'. *The Times*, October 9. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/paisley-meets-catholic-church-in-groundbreaking-talks-6wdbbtvnj98>

Brady, Nicola. 2019. 'General Secretary's Report'. In *Irish Council of Churches Annual Report 2018*, 7–11. Belfast: Irish Council of Churches.

Breen, Suzanne. 2017. 'Politicians are urged to restore powers by church leaders', *The Belfast Telegraph*, June 26. <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/politicians-are-urged-to-restore-powers-by-church-leaders-35864641.html>

Brewer, John, Gareth Higgins and Francis Teeney. 2011. *Religion, Civil Society, and Peace in Northern Ireland*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Church Leaders (Ireland) Group. 2019. 'A Time for Courageous and Compassionate Leadership.' <https://www.irishchurches.org/news-blog/5377/church-leaders-release-dialogue-initiative>

Ganiel, Gladys. 2016a. 'Secularism, Ecumenism and Identity on the Island of Ireland'. In *Christianity and National Identity in Twentieth Century Europe*, edited by John Carter Wood, 73–90. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Ganiel, Gladys. 2016b. *Transforming Post-Catholic Ireland*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ganiel, Gladys. 2019. *Unity Pilgrim: The Life of Fr Gerry Reynolds CSsR*. Dundalk: Redemptorist Communications.

Ganiel, Gladys. 2021. (forthcoming). 'Protestants and Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland: Overcoming Opposition, Apathy and a Loss of Legitimacy?' In *Northern Ireland: 20 Years of Peace and Reconciliation?* edited by Brigitte Bastiat, Olivier Coquelin and Frank Healy. Bern: Peter Lang.

Ganiel, Gladys and John Brewer. 2018. 'How Churches are Missing their Opportunity to Help Build Peace in Northern Ireland.' *The Conversation*. April 9. <https://theconversation.com/how-churches-are-missing-their-opportunity-to-help-build-peace-in-northern-ireland-93819>

Ganiel, Gladys and Jamie Yohanis,. 2019. *Considering Grace: Presbyterians and the Troubles*. Dublin: Merrion Press.

## References

- McCullagh, Mervyn. 2016. 'Executive Officer's Report'. In Irish Council of Churches Annual Report 2015, 7–14. Belfast: Irish Council of Churches.
- McDowell, Peter. 2021 (forthcoming). 'The Irish Churches' Peace Project: A Catalyst for Peace'. *Irish Theological Quarterly*, 86.
- Moriarty, Gerry. 2015. 'Political instability in North erasing hope, say Church Leaders', *The Irish Times*, September 22. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/political-instability-in-north-erasing-hope-say-church-leaders-1.2360722>
- Power, Maria. 2006. *From Ecumenism to Community Relations*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.
- Power, Maria. 2008. 'Of some symbolic importance but not much else: The Irish Inter-Church Meeting and Ecumenical Dialogue in Northern Ireland since 1980'. *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 43(1): 111–23.
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland. 2020. 'Considering Grace: Presbyterians and the Troubles – a Study Resource'. Belfast: Presbyterian Church in Ireland.
- Sandal, Nukhet A. 2017. *Religious Leaders and Conflict Transformation. Northern Ireland and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, Florence. 2015. 'Ireland's churches unite in support of Stormont deal', *Christian Today*, November 18. <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/irelands.churches.unite.in.support.of.stormont.deal/70958.htm>
- Wells, Ronald. 2010. *Hope and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland: The Role of Faith Based Organisations*. Dublin: Liffey Press.

# STANDING ON TRIAL: *CONVICTIONS*, THE CRUMLIN ROAD COURTHOUSE AND THE ROLE OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN HISTORICAL SITES OF VIOLENCE

Sadie Gilker



# STANDING ON TRIAL: *CONVICTIONS*, THE CRUMLIN ROAD COURTHOUSE AND THE ROLE OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN HISTORICAL SITES OF VIOLENCE

## Abstract

The Crumlin Road Courthouse straddles an interesting interface area, between the neighbourhoods of Ardoyne, New Lodge, and the Shankill. Situated on the Crumlin Road across from the Gaol, this building has inherited a multiplicity of meanings since its construction and design by architect Sir Charles Lanyon in 1850. This imposing building frames this analysis. In this paper the author will outline the historic uses of the courthouse, a performance of a site-specific play by Tinderbox Theatre Company called *Convictions* (2000) which took place inside the court after its closure, as well as a look at the current site and the role that urban redevelopment has had on the courthouse and Belfast in general. This building impacts the built fabric of the city in the ways that it has affected the past, its current abandoned state, and the potential, yet stagnant, redevelopment plans for the future. This interdisciplinary paper will combine performance theory and urban planning in order to assess how the arts and culture sector in Northern Ireland can be used as a peace building tool after the legacy of the Troubles. This paper seeks to critique the piecemeal urban planning regeneration zones around the courthouse and assess how these urban spaces perform on the identity of the divided populations.

KEY WORDS: *Site-specific theatre, urban regeneration, public space, Northern Ireland, good friday agreement*

## Introduction

The Crumlin Road Courthouse straddles an interesting interface area, between the neighbourhoods of Ardoyne, New Lodge, and the Shankill. Situated on the Crumlin Road across from the Gaol, this building has inherited a multiplicity of meanings since its construction and design by architect Sir Charles Lanyon in 1850. This imposing building frames this analysis. In this paper, the author intends to outline the historic uses of the courthouse, a performance of a site-specific play by Tinderbox Theatre Company called *Convictions* (2000) which took place inside the court after its closure. The courthouse impacts the built fabric of the city in the ways that it has affected the past, its current abandoned state, and the potential, yet stagnant, redevelopment plans for the future. This paper will conclude with a look at the current site and the role that urban redevelopment has had on the courthouse and Belfast in general. By looking at methods of co-creating in performance, we can find potential ways to create cohesion between divided communities who have experienced violence, which differs from the



neoliberalist intentions of creating unity through economic gains.

Drawing on performance scholars such as Gay McAuley, Joanna Tompkins, Michael McKinnie and Kathleen Irwin, we can see how site-specific performance allows space to speak and commune with the audience in a particular way. The author will examine these themes which will be expanded upon throughout the text. Supplementing these ideas on the urban sphere, we turn to Jenny Muir to localise sites in Belfast and probe the role of urban redevelopment in Belfast. Of course, spatiality of Belfast and Northern Ireland as a whole would be incomplete without building on the works of Shirlow and Murtagh (2006 2004) and Scott Bollens (2018) who have provided the basis of this paper. This interdisciplinary paper seeks to combine performance theory and urban planning in order to assess how the arts and culture sector in Northern Ireland can be used as a peace building tool after the legacy of the Troubles.



*Fig 1. Crumlin Road Courthouse, 2019. Photograph taken by author.*

### History:

Site-specific theatre commonly makes use of non-traditional performance venues in order to engage the public sphere to some degree in their performances. McAuley notes that traditional theatre buildings '[...] are the places that our society has set aside where the magic can be wrought without risk of disruption to other public spaces and the activities they house' (McAuley 2005, 27). In the 1960s, there was a rise of radical performance that began to seek new ways of expressing itself outside of these theatres. By moving away from the proscenium arch space was allowed to tell its own stories, instead of living as a representation on stage<sup>1</sup>. This radical departure allows for a different narrative to be revealed to audience members that goes beyond the performer/audience binary. The site becomes a central theme to the performance, allowing a

---

1. The proscenium arch refers to the traditional mode of viewing theatre. The arch separates the audience from the stage and frames the performance.

deeper level of engagement to be presented to the spectator. McAuley continues that:

‘Site-based performance engages more or less deeply with its chosen site and as a result tends to be drawn into engagement with the social and political issues that seem inseparable from place’ (2005, 30).

To borrow a pertinent definition of site-specific theatre from Tompkins, ‘[a] basic aim in site-specific work is to encourage audiences to see and experience more of their surroundings, and/or to see their surroundings differently’ (Tompkins 2012, 11). In the years following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA<sup>2</sup>), we can observe very intuitive theatre workers employing site-specific theatre in the post-conflict city of Belfast to help renegotiate sites of violence. By using abandoned or ‘found<sup>3</sup>’ spaces, site-specific theatre highlights prior uses and forgotten histories of the city. Site-specific performance also allows for renegotiation and questioning of the roles of ownership and control in urban areas, as the performance has the capacity to conceal and reveal certain historical aspects of neighbourhoods and buildings that previously went unnoticed.

‘Ownership brings with it power, authority, rights, boundaries, the policing of boundaries, rights of exclusion, rights of inclusion. Our sense of who we are and other people’s sense of who we are is deeply bound up with where we are, and where we come from, so place is implicated in profound ways with both individual and group identity’ (McAuley 2005, 30–31).

These questions of ownership can be seen through the analysis of the site-specific performance of *Convictions* (2000), that took place in Belfast in the post-GFA era. This section analyses *Convictions* and how it engages with public spaces, providing information on how cross-community relations can be improved using theatre, as well as calling into question the role of urban redevelopment in historical sites of violence.

### **Convictions:**

What makes *Convictions* so potent, is the use of contested urban spaces in a peaceful manner. It provides a platform to study how co-creation and performance have the power to reduce tensions between conflicting communities. In the case of *Convictions*, the space of the Crumlin Road Courthouse is paramount. As mentioned, the building

---

2. In 1998 the international peace treaty, the GFA was signed, heralding in a new era of peace in Northern Ireland, after 30 years of conflict. This introduced a power-sharing executive into the Northern Irish Assembly (Bollens, 2018, 129). With new political representation, as well as a slew of promises for desegregating the population of Northern Ireland, the GFA also allowed for an increased use of public space, which was previously inaccessible to certain populations within Northern Ireland.

3. Spaces not traditionally used for performance.

rests on an interface area located between the neighbourhoods of Ardoyne, New Lodge, and the Shankill. Situated on the Crumlin Road across from the Gaol, this building has inherited a multiplicity of meanings since its construction and design by architect Sir Charles Lanyon in 1850<sup>4</sup>. The imposing Victorian-style structures reminiscent of conventional representations of authority 'was designed to impress all who entered with the power and status of the law. Justice herself stands astride the central pediment with sword and scales ready to pass judgment and dispense the verdict' (Stelfox 2000, 50). The Crumlin Road Courthouse was an active court from 1850 until its closure in 1998. The Crumlin Road Courthouse issued sentences to offenders, who were then ushered to the Gaol across the street by an underground tunnel. It has been estimated that 'as many as 25,000 [loyalist] and [republican] prisoners are believed to have trekked through the tunnel during the course of the Troubles' (Bowcott 2006 quoted in Urban 2011, 76). Many of these prisoners being tried in the Diplock Courts, which 'became one of the most controversial parts of the British judicial system in Northern Ireland because of their reliance on anonymous 'supergrass' testimony and their abandonment of trial by jury' (McKinnie 2003, 583). It is apparent that this building weighed heavily on the psyche of the population of Belfast. Just as the Troubles touched every fabric of life in Belfast, this courthouse became a central symbol in the violence, as a place where final judgment would be enacted upon perpetrators of violence as well as being an active symbol of the law.

Two years after its official closure, Tinderbox Theatre Company used the space to stage *Convictions*. At the time of the play it was slated to be redeveloped into a luxury hotel, yet it still sits empty, and in a serious state of decay<sup>5</sup>, 20 years on from the performance. This liminal state allowed it to become a representation of the transition in Northern Irish society between a dark past and a promising future. According to Michael McKinnie 'the focus of *Convictions* was the historically contingent and authoritative place that its staging practice allowed the audience to encounter: the courthouse itself' (2003, 583). The audience entered the building and were divided up and ushered off into different rooms. The audience were able to explore the history of the courthouse, engaging with the embedded nature of memories of the building through stories regarding the past, present, and future redevelopment. The performance structure brought in playwrights to write seven short 'playlets', supplemented with art installations 'all under the common themes of justice, the act of passing judgment, the notion of laying to rest the past, and the anticipation of the future' (Urban 2011, 75). The audience then converged at the end for Martin Lynch's playlet, where a ghost of a hanged man harangues the audience for participating in such a voyeuristic performance of pain embodied by the courthouse.

---

4. Sir Charles Lanyon, 1813-1889, was the architect behind building many of Belfast's historical landmarks, such as Queen's University Belfast, the Palm House in the Botanic Gardens, the Customs House and the Crumlin Road Gaol, to name a few.

5. During the writing of this paper, on June 1, 2020 at 3:00 a.m. the Courthouse was subjected to yet another arson attack. The first arson attack occurred in 2009.

Two of these 'playlets' provide insight into urban redevelopment anxieties in the year 2000. This also provides us with a salient point in which to reflect, as the courthouse still remains unused and has fallen into a state of disrepair. In *Court No. 2* by Marie Jones, we are faced with three characters who are hired to turn the courthouse into a heritage centre. There is a disagreement in how the dramatic re-enactment of a trial should be portrayed, leading to most of the characters walking out of the discussions. This playlet ends with the audience stuck in a limbo, unaware if the plans to turn the courthouse into a heritage centre will be realised, or if it is even a possibility, given the complicated narratives surrounding the courthouse itself.

*Male Toilets* by Daragh Carville takes place in the basement of the courthouse, where the two characters, the Photographer and the Words Man, debate the future of the building. The Words Man has a proposal to turn the courthouse into a Tourist Information Centre. The photographer jokes, stating that 'Well we never used to have them, did we? Back in the old days, like [...] I mean, we used to have TERRORIST information Centres, I'll grant you that, we had the Terrorist Information Centres. But now it's all TOURIST Information Centres. Tourist Information Centres all over the shop. It's not the same. It's fucked up' (Carville 2000, 34). After some back and forth the Words Man explains 'I say it's not JUST gonna be a Tourist Information Centre. There's gonna be a whole heritage complex here, a whole heritage park. Tourists Information Centre's only a part of it' (ibid). They discuss the implications of tourist centres, voicing a worry that now that the Troubles are over, Northern Ireland will not be in the news so much, therefore creating less tourism. The two discuss the idea of setting off the 'occasional bomb' in the winter time, away from the peak tourist season. The Photographer insists that 'The yanks! Yanks'll lap it up. Look at the Troubles tours and all that. They fucking love it' (ibid, 37). The two discuss the idea further, with the Words Man saying that he would think about it, and the playlet ends with them exiting the male toilets, the Photographer's arm around the Words Man's shoulder. This action insinuates that they have reached a conclusion that keeping the Troubles alive in some aspect would be beneficial for the courthouse as a heritage centre, Tourist Information Centre, as well as broader aspects of urban regeneration and economic development in the form of 'Terror-Tourism' in Northern Ireland.

### Urban regeneration:

The Courthouse still remains empty twenty years on from its closure, while the Gaol across the street has flourished into a tourist hotspot. Visitors can tour the gaol, learning about its history, as well as attending conferences, concerts and other events that are held on the premises year-round. The courthouse was excluded from this redevelopment project due to its private developer ownership (Muir 2014). While multiple plans have been proposed to turn the courthouse into a hotel, there has been no movement on these plans. On the other hand, the Crumlin Road Gaol falls in line with other urban redevelopment projects in Belfast, which have achieved various levels of success, such

as the Titanic Quarter, Castle Court Shopping Centre and Victoria Square, which will be expanded upon below.

In reality, while GFA was intended to create peace and cross-community collaboration between the divided communities, Jenny Muir who writes on urban regeneration in Belfast states that:

'The settlement has ended over thirty years of violence but has not been able to alter the long-standing territorial nature of the region's social relations, with implications for all aspects of public policy. [...] the territorial nature of the conflict continues to impact on many aspects of life in Northern Ireland, and much residential segregation between Protestant and Catholic areas remains' (2014, 53).

This is a failure of the GFA's aim to bring the two communities together to create a lasting peace. While Northern Ireland adopts a more neoliberalist agenda, focusing on creating new spaces in the city for the 'Creative Class' we can see more divides opening up in areas of the city that are blighted by multiple deprivation factors, such poverty, low literacy rates and access to services.

Therefore, urban redevelopment concerns voiced in *Convictions* were unfounded, but also raises the question: would a Tourist Information Centre be worse than an abandoned building? The role of site-specific theatre to bring attention to these spaces in the public sphere is important, not only for the arts sectors, but also highlights misuse of the urban sphere carried out by private developers. Gaffikin, Morrissey and Sterrett called for a 'Creative City' 'in which networks of innovation and fresh-thinking are nurtured through multi-agency and cross-sectoral partnerships' (2001, 156). While the Creative City concept would soon spiral out of control, homogenising and damaging cities which employed these measures (Wainwright 2017), Gaffikin et al., did highlight that Crumlin Road Courthouse and Gaol would have been perfect to launch new urban regeneration ideas in Belfast, as 'there would be two clear advantages to this siting. The road embraces both communities on either side of it and also contains empty space for the provision of new cultural facilities' (2001, 154). Since changing hands from being a quasi-public governmental building to being owned by private developers, 'a series of fires have led to the loss of important interiors and rendered what remains of the building highly vulnerable' (Harkin 2015, 155). Rita Harkin continues with:

'In August 2013, Minister for Social Development, Nelson McCausland MLA, announced that consultants had begun work on a development study, guided by a steering group consisting of DSD, the Strategic Investment Board, the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister, Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Belfast City Council. The study aims to identify potential uses for the courthouse that are deliverable, sustainable and make a contribution to the wider social, economic and physical regeneration of the area' (2015, 156).



It is then surprising, that after all this time, with multiple organisations calling out for redesign and reuse of the Courthouse that it still sits empty. While the Gaol was more successful than the Courthouse in its redevelopment, it cannot be denied that the spaces of these places speak volumes about the liminality of the peace process through their states of regeneration. One fully involved in the post-conflict North, offering up a multitude of tours based on dark history to visitors, the other in a complete state of disrepair, reflecting the ignored past which continues to impact Northern Irish society today.

## Conclusion

Performance scholar, Kathleen Irwin writes, 'Where the performed site and the city mesh, the structures and institutions, buildings and monuments that provide the visual frame also provide the aesthetic, social, political and historical context within which event, spectator and place are situated' (2007, 30–31). The performance does not end with the metaphorical 'final curtain'. The performance becomes embedded in the history of the site. The lived experience of co-creating a work of art changes the view of the building of those involved, either as writers, artists, or audience members. By highlighting issues within urban regeneration in a post-conflict society, we can glean profound knowledge of these spaces through the use of performance which creates a holistic approach to urban planning, which has the capacity to include more voices. The use of co-creation has the capacity to open up public spaces as it engages communities surrounding the neighbourhood and provides a use for these buildings. By engaging with the built form, theatre companies such as Tinderbox, are able to bring the past and future of these non-places to the forefront of the public eye, thereby calling into question the role of urban redevelopment in a 'post-conflict' city and questioning who really benefits from these policy implications. Areas of urban redevelopment such as the Titanic Quarter, the Castle Court Shopping Centre and Victoria Square are all examples of spaces in the city which have been usurped by private developers with the intention of creating jobs, and economic activity for the city of Belfast, yet do not actively engage with cross-community relations or desegregation. In a scathing article written by Phil Ramsey regarding urban redevelopment of the Titanic Quarter, Ramsey outlines that private developers are set to gain massive sums of money under the guise of redeveloping an area using public funds. Ramsey's tongue in cheek commentary regarding creative industries as outlined above states that:

'Following the GFA [...], the setting up of power-sharing institutions and relative peace, there is an agreed interpretation: peace has come; it is time to have a normal society; today, normal societies spend money. The best way to reach conflict resolution is to turn the antagonists into consumers. Rather than fighting on the streets, Northern Ireland's people ought to be fighting for the best bargains in the aisles' (Ramsey 2013, 175).

As seen in this paper, performances were able to open up violent spaces created by the courthouse and create a new narrative of this space by reflecting thoughtfully on its past, through many voices. By shifting from an economic-centric mode of urban regeneration to an arts-based practice it is possible to see a new narrative for urban redevelopment, and perhaps a more tenable peace in Northern Ireland. This new future depends on the arts sector highlighting voices that are often overlooked in planning processes, and to help engage the communities which still remain at high levels of segregation twenty years on from the signing of the GFA.

## References

- Bollens, Scott A. 2018. *Trajectories of Conflict and Peace: Jerusalem and Belfast since 1994*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Carville, Daragh. 2000. *Convictions*. Belfast: Tinderbox Theatre Company.
- Gaffikin, Frank, Michael Morrissey and Ken Sterrett. 2001. 'Remaking the City: the Role of Culture in Belfast.' In *Urban Planning and Cultural Inclusion: Lessons from Belfast and Berlin*, edited by William J. V. Neill and Hanns-Uve Schwedler, 141–162. Palgrave.
- Harkin, Rita. 2015. 'Anything Goes: Architectural destruction in Northern Ireland after "the Troubles"'. In *Architecture and Armed Conflict: The Politics of Destruction*, edited by J. M Mancini and Keith Bresnahan, 147–163. London and New York: Routledge.
- Irwin, Kathleen. 2007. 'The Ambit of Performativity: How Site Makes Meaning in Site-Specific Performance'. University of Art and Design Helsinki.
- McAuley, Gay. 2005. 'Site-specific Performance: Place, Memory and the Creative Agency of the Spectator.' *Arts: The Journal of Sydney University Arts Association* 27: 27–51.
- McKinnie, Michael. 2003. 'The state of this place: *Convictions*, the Courthouse, and the geography of performance in Belfast.' *Modern drama* 46(4): 580–597.
- Muir, Jenny. 2014. 'Neoliberalising a divided society? The regeneration of Crumlin Road Gaol and Girdwood Park, North Belfast.' *Local Economy* 29(1–2): 52–64.
- Ramsey, Phil. 2013. "'A Pleasingly Blank Canvas": Urban Regeneration in Northern Ireland and the Case of Titanic Quarter.' *Space and Polity* 17(2): 164–179.
- Shirlow, Peter and Brendan Murtagh. 2004. 'Capacity-building, Representation and Intracommunity Conflict.' *Urban Studies* 41(1): 57–70.
- Shirlow, Peter and Brendan Murtagh. 2006. *Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City*. London, Dublin, Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press.
- Stelfox, Dawson. 2000. *Convictions*. Belfast: Tinderbox Theatre Company.
- Tompkins, Joanne. 2012. 'The "Place" and Practice of Site-Specific Theatre and Performance.' In *Performing Site-Specific Theatre: Politics, Place and Practice*, by Joanne Tompkins, edited by Anna Birch and Joanne Tompkins 1–17. Palgrave Macmillan UK.

## References

Urban, Eva. 2011. *Community Politics and the Peace Process in Contemporary Northern Irish Drama*. Oxford, New York: Peter Lang.

Urban, Eva. 2011. *Community Politics and the Peace Process in Contemporary Northern Irish Drama*. Oxford, New York: Peter Lang.

Wainwright, Oliver. 2017. "'Everything is gentrification now': but Richard Florida isn't sorry"

*The Guardian*, 26 October. <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/oct/26/gentrification-richard-florida-interview-creative-class-new-urban-crisis>

# TRAUMA, DENIAL AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: THE LEGACY OF PROTESTANT DISPLACEMENT IN LONDONDERRY/DERRY DURING THE TROUBLES

Niall Gilmartin





# TRAUMA, DENIAL AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: THE LEGACY OF PROTESTANT DISPLACEMENT IN LONDONDERRY/DERRY DURING THE TROUBLES

## Abstract

Despite growing calls for a more adequate and nuanced understanding of forced displacement and its impact on peacebuilding globally, it is one that has not figured prominently in either the literature or the practice of transitional justice in Northern Ireland. Based on semi-structured interviews, this article seeks to map issues of legacy, truth and acknowledgment onto the experiences of Protestant displacement in Londonderry-Derry's West Bank over the course of the Troubles. The article finds a collective frustration among Protestants that their forced exile is being denied, or at best, deliberately obfuscated, thus compounding their sense of loss and hurt. Furthermore, as a form of conflict-related violence that does not fit neatly into the category of 'victim-perpetrator', the article finds that 'bottom up' transitional justice practices such as oral histories and public story-telling offer the transformative potential to those displaced in their endeavours seeking truth, acknowledgement and recognition. Interviewees consistently stressed the need for nationalists and republicans to hear their stories and acknowledge them as a means of addressing the legacy of displacement through cross-community dialogue, with a view to making city centre 'a warm house for Protestants and Protestant culture.'

**KEYWORDS:** *forced displacement, Protestants, Londonderry-Derry, legacy, the Troubles*

## Introduction

The demand for truth and justice by victims and survivors is an integral part of any post-conflict transitional process that seeks to meaningfully address and deal with conflict-related trauma and hurt. The violence of the Troubles in Northern Ireland has typically been measured using standardised assessments (e.g. number of deaths, injuries, economic impact). Much of the focus with regards to addressing legacy has, understandably, centred on the needs and interests of those who lost loved ones or those physically and psychologically harmed through shootings and bombings. But there are other forms of violence, harm and trauma which need to be considered and addressed, including the legacy of forced displacement. Based on semi-structured interviews with those who experienced forced movement<sup>1</sup>, this article seeks to map issues of legacy, truth and acknowledgment onto the experiences of Protestant<sup>2</sup> displacement in Londonderry-Derry's<sup>3</sup> West Bank<sup>4</sup> over the course of the conflict. This case study is part of a larger research project gathering first-hand testimonies of forced displacement across Northern Ireland that seeks to give voice to the often-unheard

narratives of the displaced, shedding light on the multi-layered short and long-term harms and consequences of displacement for individuals, families and community relations. In considering the narratives of the displaced, this article suggests a strong need to broaden our understandings of conflict-related violence in Northern Ireland to include displacement and its long-term impact on individuals, families, communities and community relations.

Colloquially known as the Exodus (Burgess 2011), the Protestant population in the West Bank decreased from 8,459 in 1971 to 1,407 in 1991, a reduction of 7,052. By 2001, this had decreased further to 1,543, indicating an overall trend of Protestant movement out of the city area completely (Smyth 1996, 53). The last remaining Protestant enclave on the West Bank, the Fountain, is bordered in many places with segregation walls, and has been the target of numerous (and often orchestrated) attacks by nationalists. Its residents consistently express feelings of vulnerability, isolation and often alienation from the city centre (Shirlow et al. 2005). The causes of Protestant movement have been the subject of visceral debate and contestation within the city and beyond. A recent report commissioned by the Pat Finucane Centre caused much anger when it suggested a myriad of factors for Protestant movement such as jobs, housing, redevelopment and sectarian intimidation (Hansson and McLaughlin 2018). It is clear however, from existing research (Burgess 2011; Kingsley 1989; McKay 2000; O'Dochartaigh 2005; Shirlow et al. 2005; Southern 2007; Smyth 1996) and my own research here that while issues of housing and employment were clearly factors for some, the overarching reasons for many were intimidation (direct and indirect), the targeting of RUC and UDR personnel by the IRA, bomb attacks in the city centre, feelings of insecurity and vulnerability, and an overwhelming sense that Protestants, their identity and culture were not welcome in the West Bank.

### **Victims and trauma**

The conventional understanding of trauma with regards to the Troubles has typically focused on harms caused by shootings, bombings and related physical violence. Trauma typically refers to the psychological impact of some violent or otherwise shocking event, producing deep-rooted effects which overwhelm the individual, making it difficult to process and come to terms with (Dawson 2007; 2017). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can manifest in multiple forms of physical and psychological distress; while the 'event' may have occurred in the past, its effects may be long-term, and manifest in multiple and contrasting ways. Graham Dawson's concept of a 'traumatised community' draws upon three key proposals regarding past violence: first, a sense of profound suffering has been inflicted on and endured by a community; second, the persistence into the present of a harmful social past with disturbing legacies; and thirdly, a relation of memory whereby the suffering of the past is remembered, often incompletely, by a community or alternatively forgotten or rendered invisible (2007: 62). With regards to their individual experiences of displacement, all research participants spoke of the

trauma of losing their family home, their communities, social networks, their places of employment, worship and education. 'Rita' and her family were directly intimidated and forced to leave their home close to the city centre in 1972:

'I have to tell you it was heart-breaking leaving our wee house, that you had paid for, that you had furnished and done up, built on a bathroom and kitchen; heartbreaking. There were two councillors and they sat with us and they got us a new house in Newbuildings which is just about 5 miles out the road. I hated it back in 1972, a total different ball game; you were out in the sticks [rural area], a different environment, you knew nobody.'

'Robert's' family were from the Northlands area of the West Bank; his father was a member of the RUC and the family home was targeted on many occasions:

'My father was a policeman and we were shot at; our house was shot at, at least two or three times through the front door; and on other occasions then they tried to break into the back and they tried to get in through the backdoor and it was just intimidation. But my father was determined that he was not going to move. But it ended up with the police saying to my father, they couldn't do any more in terms of security and so we had to move.'

When asked about the actual event of losing their home, many responded that while it was painful, there was an element of 'getting on with it' and 'making the best of the situation'. However, it was clear that many still feel an acute sense of pain and loss when recalling these events. The effects of displacement were of course consumed with the immediacy of losing a family home; for many, these were homes that had been in their family for generations. The impact and effects of losing the family home for many, only began to manifest in the subsequent years. 'Robert' recalls:

'At the end of the day my mother and father did not want to move but for their own safety they had to and then the house was up for sale and it was up for sale for I don't know how long but nobody put a bid on the house. And the house was worth £15,000 and I think she got £5,000. But my mother only lasted 6 years after that; she died 6 years after that and certainly part of it was that she missed the area; she missed the area she grew up in.'

Robert's father also died a short time after his wife. Their home had been in the family for generations and 'Robert' is adamant that this was a significant factor in the untimely deaths of his parents. Many other research participants in other parts of Northern Ireland also recounted how the loss of the family home severely impacted their parents emotional and psychological wellbeing. In addition to the liminality and trauma of losing their homes in Londonderry-Derry, forced movement also brought new challenges. The displacement from home and community in the West Bank profoundly

shaped access to resources, education, work, social and familial networks, status and sense of identity. All respondents were urban dwellers and always had been; they now found themselves relocated to villages and areas that were essentially rural and under-developed. While exile was essentially a necessity to escape insecurity and vulnerability, resettlement brought new forms of isolation and vulnerability. Phyllis recalls:

‘We were heading for Newbuildings and while the houses were ready for occupation, there was no roads, there’s no infrastructure, no streetlights; you’re out in the country area so no shops. I think there was one post office..... but you had to go wherever you are sent, wherever they had, you had to go and I never got over it. People took that to the graves with them ... people leaving homes they were born in and reared in. I wouldn’t be that attached to a building if you know what I mean but we had no choice, no choice whatsoever. So, for anybody to say that Protestants were moving out because they were getting new houses is just nonsense, it’s just nonsense.’

On a personal and most intimate level, the loss of a home represents a source of psychological trauma but it is also clear from the research participants that forced displacement is invariably intertwined with territory, place and belonging. Despite the passage of time and physical changes to the landscape, there is an unaddressed legacy here of ‘long-term’ exile. Many people in this research have lived outside the West Bank for 45 years or more. And although they have rebuilt their lives in places like Newbuildings, many still speak of their original home in Londonderry-Derry as their true home. For many there is a lasting and durable sense of loss for place, neighbours and community that has not mitigated in the intervening decades. That sense of loss is exacerbated by the collective sense of ‘retreat’, a phrase that is ubiquitous across the interviews. For many Protestants, the city of Londonderry-Derry is of significant historical and symbolic value in unionist culture. According to ‘Philip’, “nobody talked about it because there is a good deal of shame attached to it, that they had run away; people felt that they run away and there was a deal of shame attached that. And then people were told that it never happened.”

Many in this research stated that the Exodus for Protestants is akin to what Bloody Sunday is for the Catholic community; Philip states that: ‘the impact that [displacement] had on the Protestant community in this city was immense and still is and people I spoke to at the time had never been across the bridge again; they left and never came back again.’ Most conventional readings of the Troubles in Londonderry-Derry tend to pivot round Bloody Sunday in 1972 and the Civil Rights period, particularly from 5th October 1968 to the eruption of civil unrest in August 1969. The predominance of such narratives invariably creates numerous blind spots, marginalised voices and silences. In this instance, the sense of loss and trauma for displaced Protestants is compounded by a lack of public recognition, acknowledgement, and in many instances, denial.

### Truth, denial and acknowledgement

Perceptions that the Exodus is being denied, or at best, deliberately obfuscated, has compounded the sense of loss and trauma, at both an individual and collective level. As an act of violence that does not fit the traditional 'victim-perpetrator' dichotomy, many of those displaced are cognisant that the staples of traditional forms of liberal justice, such as a trial, truth recovery or accountability is not, nor ever has been, a realisable prospect. More recently, the perspectives and narratives of those exiled or displaced is recognised as essential to both addressing the root causes of conflict and building inclusive peacebuilding processes (Parry 2020). Denied the public space for trials, formal truth recovery or physical sites of commemoration, many of those displaced seek public acknowledgment and recognition of their experiences. With regards to enhancing community relations in the city, respondents in this research also stressed the need for nationalists and republicans to hear their stories, acknowledge them and seek to address the hurt through dialogue, with a view to making the city centre 'a warm house for Protestants and Protestant culture.'

Some of the research participants have been active in the community sector for many years and have engaged with nationalists and republicans on the issue of Protestant displacement but are persistently confronted with a sense of denial. 'Peter' has been engaged in community activism and cross-community work in the city for over twenty years:

'[It's ] not only because of the physical attacks and murders and intimidation but the lack of recognition ... almost like a cruel thing that that movement and the impact and trauma of that has never been recognised never mind appreciated or dealt with. Derry has been a model of good practice in so many ways and like there is this idea then of celebrating diversity and culture, and so if you're Chinese or Romanian, you are welcome here but if you're a Protestant "fuck off". The Exodus, as we call it, runs very deep in the DNA of Protestants in this city and we felt that we got a raw deal in terms of how that has been dealt with or not addressed ... and the things thrown at us is "oh you're just whinging Protestants" or "we don't believe you" and that is why it is so important to have an honest narrative. And you're not attacking anything; you're just saying "this is my story and this is my truth."'

It is clear from the field research that there is an overwhelming feeling of silence and marginalisation among the respondents; most contend that their experiences of displacement are consistently trivialised or denied. 'Defining denial as information that is too threatening or disturbing to be publicly acknowledged, and so, must be repressed or reinterpreted, denial is inherent to the practice of social exclusion (Cohen 2001, 25) – denial of others' suffering creates the framework for legitimising violence against the other' (Shirlow 2018). All respondents articulated a view that denials from the nationalist and republican community have impacted negatively on community relations in the city, despite the advancements of the last twenty-five years. While

research participants do not represent a homogenous group, the commonality across all was an aspiration for public acknowledgment of hurt and the opportunity for 'storytelling.' According to transitional justice principles, alternative forms of justice that meet the needs of victims include truth recovery processes, oral testimonies, official acknowledgement, and the establishment of an authoritative record of past violence (Lundy 2011). Localised forms of truth recovery do play an important role in transforming societies emerging from conflict and Northern Ireland has widely used storytelling, oral recordings and archives, as well as witness programs as important means in the quest for public acknowledgement.

However, many of Northern Ireland's endeavours to address the past, though by no means all, are often embedded in processes of assigning culpability and blame, rather than reconciliation and transformation. Therefore, the potential benefits of sharing personal and communal stories of past violence are also weighed against the likely prospect of rejection and denial. The construction of 'true victims' and lack of consensus in Northern Ireland regarding an acceptable definition of victimhood is highly politicised, for it encapsulates the moral virtues of the groups involved in the conflict and addresses their separate claims to moral justification for the war (Brewer 2010). The vexed post-Troubles battle over victimhood is embedded in a wider, adversarial framework whereby definitions of victim identity are ultimately vehicles for advancing particular narrative constructions for apportioning culpability for the 30 years of violence (Dawson 2007; Jankowitz 2018; McEvoy and McConnachie 2013; Shirlow 2018). Many participants believe the nationalist and republican community will not countenance an acknowledgment of the loss and trauma caused by the Exodus; an acknowledgment would signify an admission of culpability, thereby undermining republican narratives of the nature of the conflict<sup>5</sup>. While some respondents stated that an acknowledgment from the republican community was highly unlikely, others continue to invest much energy into communicating the Exodus narratives through the means of storytelling and other formats, and genuinely believe it has the transformative potential to enhance community relations in the city. 'Philip' expresses his hope for storytelling and oral testimonies:

'I believe everyone in society needs to have their voice heard because when you don't you will always have people stuck in the house screaming at the wall and that is not a healing society. What I'm trying to do here is to tell stories [of the Exodus] so people from outside can empathise on a global basis and also the Catholic Community here who are ignorant of a lot of aspects of my community, and some of those reasons are also as much the fault of my own community. They've been silent as much as they have been ignored and that is something that has to be rectified and so that's how I see the future going.'

As articulated by 'Philip', most of the research participants look towards various communicative platforms for 'storytelling', including direct dialogue, plays, books,



documentaries, among others, not only as a means of seeking acknowledgement but also by way of giving voice to the Protestant experience. Like Protestant and Unionist victims' groups from the Border areas (Dawson 2007; Donnan 2005; Donnan and Simpson 2007), the Exodus has emerged as a central conduit of communicating the collective story of Protestant experiences of the Troubles in Londonderry-Derry city with a view to seeking recognition and acknowledgement as part of a suite of measures to address the individual and collective legacy of forced displacement in the city. To marginalise or deny (and that includes silence) is to increase social exclusion and thus denial becomes a practice that re-enforces harm. Acknowledging and listening to overlooked or marginalised perspectives and experiences can only enhance our comprehensions regarding conflict and its many harms, and furthermore, challenge some of the orthodoxies within conventional or accepted narratives, thus forcing us to reevaluate our understandings of violence, legacy and our endeavours for addressing it. While the notion of oral testimony is tempered by the reality that issues of justice, guilt and accountability are effectively dispensed with, nevertheless, in certain instances such as historical displacement, the role of 'storytelling' and other bottom-up acknowledgment projects is seen by victims and survivors as an effective vehicle to 'break' the silence, challenge denial and offer a counter-narrative for those displaced during the conflict.

## Conclusion

Restoring the wounds of past violence and injustice goes beyond retributive justice or revenge – and certainly nobody in this research advocated revenge or retribution, rather they wanted recognition and acknowledgement. When a political unit – state, ethnic group, or community fails to recognise victims' suffering, it compounds the trauma and ultimately functions as a secondary form of injustice.

The practice of acknowledgement is inter-relational, and requires dialogue, empathy and understanding. Public acknowledgment of Protestant displacement is therefore more than simply being mindful or knowing about an injustice or past hurts; it is about conferring public recognition that an injustice was committed in the name of a particular political unit or collective. In doing so, it validates the hurt and trauma of those exiled and has the potential to establish new relations or understandings regarding legacy issues.

## Endnotes

1. This article is based on field research conducted by the author between April 2018 and March 2020, collecting 43 in-depth interviews with those who suffered displacement. The interviews occurred in Belfast, Londonderry-Derry, Liverpool, Shannon, Fermanagh, Dundalk and Dublin. Of the 43 interviews, 24 were male, 19 female; 19 self-identified as a Protestant or unionist while the remaining 22 self-identified as Catholic or nationalist. To protect the identity of those involved, all participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

2. My use of the term 'Protestant' does not signify a homogenous, unified community; differences of class, gender, location and political affiliation all contribute to the complexity of identification in Northern Ireland society. I am also cognisant that religious affiliation typically functions as a marker of ethnic identity and constitutional preferences. Given that the overwhelming majority of Protestants support the union, my use of the term Protestant is a means of using a common identity while also respecting the diversity within it.

3. As is typically the case in Northern Ireland, terminology and discourse are politically loaded. Although the city council changed its name from Londonderry City Council to Derry City Council in 1984, the official title of the city remains Londonderry. All research participants expressed their preference for the term 'Londonderry-Derry' which is used throughout this article.

4. In the 2011 census, the population of Londonderry-Derry city was 81,902; 77.95% belong to or were brought up in the Catholic religion and 19.23% belong to or were brought up in a 'Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related)' religion. The city is divided by the River Foyle, broadly creating the West Bank, which is home to the city centre and the Waterside. Although the Waterside has historically contained a Protestant majority, the last census indicates that it is now evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics. The West Bank is the most heavily populated part of the city, predominantly Catholic and the location for the majority of conflict-related violence in the city.

5. Typically, republicans are accused by unionists and others of attempting to 'rewrite' history to justify their violence as non-sectarian and a 'war of liberation'. Many nationalists and others accuse the British state, unionists and loyalist paramilitaries of concealing their role in the conflict, particularly committing human rights violations and social exclusion against Catholic citizens. For an insightful overview of this complex debate, see Kieran McEvoy and Kirstin McConnachie, 'Victims and Transitional Justice: Voice, Agency and Blame,' *Social and Legal Studies* 22 (4) (2013): 489–513.

## Acknowledgements

The author wishes to sincerely thank all those participants who generously gave their time to share their stories for this research. The author wishes to thank the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and feedback. The author wishes to express gratitude to Brian Dougherty and all those at the Newgate Arts Centre in Londonderry-Derry for their support and assistance. This research is funded by the Irish Research Council and the Busted Postdoctoral Scholarship at the University of Liverpool. The author wishes to thank Colin Coulter, Pete Shirlow and Mervyn Busted for their support throughout this research.

## References

- Brewer, John D. 2010. *Peace Processes: A Sociological Approach*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Brewer, John D. and Bernadette C. Hayes. 2011. 'Victims as moral beacons: victims and perpetrators in Northern Ireland.' *Contemporary Social Science* 6(1):73–88.
- Burgess, Jonathan. 2011. *The Exodus: The Story that Had to Be Told*. Londonderry: Causeway Press.
- Cohen, Stanley. 2001. *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Dawson, Graham. 2007. *Making peace with the past? Memory, Trauma and the Irish Troubles*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Dawson, Graham. 2017. 'The Meaning of "Moving On": From Trauma to the History and Memory of Emotions in "Post-conflict" Northern Ireland.' *Irish University Review* 47(1):82–102.
- Donnan, Hastings. 2005. 'Material Identities: Fixing Ethnicity in the Irish Borderland.' *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 12(1): 69–105.
- Donnan, Hastings and Kirk Simpson 2007. 'Silence and Violence among Northern Ireland Border Protestants.' *Ethnos* 72(1): 5–28.
- Hansson, Ulf and Helen McLaughlin. 2018. *Protestant Migration from the West Bank of Derry / Londonderry 1969–1980*. Derry: Pat Finucane Centre.
- Jankowitz, Sarah E. 2018. *The Order of Victimhood. Violence, Hierarchy, and Building Peace in Northern Ireland*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kingsley, Paul. 1989. *Londonderry Revisited*. Belfast: Belfast Publications.
- Lundy, Patricia. 2011. 'Paradoxes and Challenges of Transitional Justice at the "Local" Level: Historical Enquiries in Northern Ireland.' *Contemporary Social Science* 6(1): 89–105.
- McEvoy, Kieran and Kirstin McConnachie. 2013. 'Victims and transitional justice: voice, agency and blame.' *Social and Legal Studies* 22(4): 489–513.
- McKay, Susan. 2000. *Northern Protestants: An Unsettled People*. Belfast: Blackstaff Press.

## References

Ó Dochartaigh, Niall. 2005. *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Parry, Jacqueline. 2020. 'Constructing space for refugee voices in national peacebuilding processes'. *Peacebuilding* 8(2): 159–177. DOI: 10.1080/21647259.2018.1551279

Shirlow, Peter, Brian Graham, Amanda McMullan, Brendan Murtagh, Gillian Robinson and Neil Southern. 2005. *Population Change and Social Inclusion Study. Derry/Londonderry. OFMDFM*.

Shirlow, Peter. 2018. 'Truth friction in Northern Ireland: caught between apologia and humiliation.' *Parliamentary Affairs* 71: 417–37.

Smyth, Marie. 1996. *Two Policy Papers. Derry and Londonderry*: Templegrove Action Research.

Southern, Neil. 2007. 'Protestant alienation in Northern Ireland: a political, cultural and geographical examination'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33(1): 159–180.

# **'NOT SO MUCH ABOUT BELFAST, AS *OF* BELFAST': LESSONS FOR THE DISCOURSE OF PUBLIC HISTORY FROM THE APPROACH OF POST-CONFLICT BELFAST POETRY**

**Samuel Guthrie**





# 'NOT SO MUCH ABOUT BELFAST, AS OF BELFAST': LESSONS FOR THE DISCOURSE OF PUBLIC HISTORY FROM THE APPROACH OF POST- CONFLICT BELFAST POETRY

## Abstract

*But as the charred beams hissed and flicked I glimpsed a map of Belfast In the ruins:  
obliterated streets, the faint impression of a key.*

– Ciaran Carson, *The Irish for No*, 'Smithfield Market,' ll. 7-8.

The legacy of the Belfast Agreement is neither simple nor static: a peace at once realised yet still in progress, as recent events continue to illustrate the liminal nature of the city and its peace. Commemorative efforts in Northern Ireland have focused on the key variations of sharing inherent to the peace process – a 'shared space' and the 'shared future' – but rarely seek to interrogate or challenge collective identities. This paper considers how one might read a poem like a museum. I argue that both represent contact zones through which genuine cross-community cultural exchange is possible across the liminal, poetic space at the heart of the heritage of post-conflict Belfast.

KEYWORDS: *poetry, Belfast, public history, commemoration*

## Introduction

A public historian may not appear, at first glance, a likely candidate to examine contemporary Belfast poetry and its relevance to the peace process. There are, however, crucial similarities between how one might *read* a museum or a poem; they are both, after all, forms of 'contact zones' within which perspectives 'enter into dialogic exchanges that are not subordinated to a controlling point of view.' (Clifford 1997; Bennett 2006; 279) Both the curator and the poet distil a subject by utilising relevant artifacts to present a work representative of a whole, the latter through metaphor and the former through material objects. I am playfully proposing that a reading of changes in poetry written about Belfast since 1998 may offer a novel approach to the peace process and representations of its history. The legacy of the Belfast Agreement is neither simple nor static and the recent restoration of power-sharing at Stormont is illustrative of the liminal nature of the peace process – a peace at once realised yet still in progress – and the city itself. I will argue in this paper, through a selection of readings, that contemporary Belfast poetry, like a museum or heritage site, represents a contact zone through which genuine loyalist/nationalist cultural exchange, within the liminal space of the post-conflict city, furthers the peace process.

Space, especially public space, plays a critical role in the peace building process; competing loyalist/nationalist paramilitaries clearly demark their spaces of influence through depictions on Belfast's gables. Post-Agreement, the progression of peace process discourse developed the language of the 'shared future', which, in part, aims to enable all communities to collectively partake in a 'shared society' and 'shared spaces' as part of the post-conflict city (for example, OFMDFM 2005). These variations on 'sharing' exist also in the field of contemporary Irish public history – these can be squared away within our conceptualisation of 'collective identities' – and are neatly exemplified by points three and five of the Community Relations Council's 'Decade Principles for Remembering in Public Space' (CRC 2017).

Shared space is that in which communities can partake in an efficient and equal cultural exchange, openly problematising and scrutinising collective identity and memory (Komarova 2008). Identity, particularly collective identities contextualised and reinforced within a community, can be defined as either contingent or categorical – the goal of those in the peace process is to foster the former. Categorical identities are essentialist; they rely on fixed perceived preconceptions and are closed to criticism. Contingent identities are open to information and study from the outside, they adapt to feedback and are self-critical (Komarova 2008). An approach that mixes these concepts of space and identity provides the contextual nexus of an 'inclusive and accepting society' and actively problematises and questions meaning and interpretation of identity. Contemporary Belfast poetry, by its literary nature, provides a novel framework to observe approaches to shared spaces. The textual structures and practicalities of the post-agreement period neglect the critical role that art may play within the wider peace process. Poetic meditations on the post-conflict city may offer an antidote to the economics and legalism of the peace process by providing new foundational texts exploring the shared space of a peaceful Northern Ireland.

To this purpose, I propose the examination of a selection of poets that, I argue, are representative of a geospatial ceasefire generation, rather than a temporal one. Grouped together by the core subject of Belfast, each of these poets has followed a shift observed in the later writing of Ciaran Carson. Comparing Carson's early Belfast-centric work to his similar later work reveals a profound change in form and tone, a change that he recognised and was not prevalent in his own contemporaries (Kennedy-Andrews 2009). Carson's writing transforms from comprehending Belfast as a setting of individual reflection to a vast liminal cityscape in which identity, memory, and history co-exist to promote interrogation and dialogue. This change in Carson was followed by a number of younger, ceasefire generation poets who took his influence in their own direction; among these I will focus on a selection of pieces from Sinead Morrissey, Alan Gillis, and Leonita Flynn.

### Ciaran Carson

Carson's poetry in *Breaking News* represents that clear change in his writing style;

embracing and, in turn, forging shared space and contingent identity. Carson's earlier poetry obsesses with observed and mapped spaces, categorical lists and the interrogation of the individual self. He identifies and presents (un)known spaces within the cityscape, take, for example, in 'Smithfield Market':

But as the charred beams hissed and flickered I glimpsed a map of Belfast  
In the ruins: obliterated streets, the faint impression of a key.  
Something many-toothed, elaborate, stirred briefly in the labyrinth. (2008, ll. 7–9)

Through the navigation of this map, a representation of physical space, Carson meditates on his self. Consider the 'fusillade of question marks' in 'Belfast Confetti':

'Why can't I escape?  
... My name? Where am I coming from? Where am I going?' (2008, ll. 7–9).

He was familiar with the contested spaces of Belfast and his early works use reference and allusion to them as fragments of the whole poet, marking points to guide a reader like the fragmented narrative presented by physical objects in a museum.

Carson's later work, however, takes the presentation of these elements of collective identity in a new direction. Fragmentation and representation take on a literal meaning wherein his poetry metaphorically reduces the city to its constituent elements and presents the gaps between them from which meaning may be read. Unlike the wordy lines of 'Belfast Confetti' there is space found throughout the poems of *Breaking News*. 'News', for example, never has more than three words to a line:

'alarms  
shrill

lights  
flash

as dust  
clears

above  
the paper  
shop

*The Belfast Telegraph*  
reads  
    *fast rap'*

(Carson 2008)

The language and structure pare back elements of description and focus on the representation of Belfast's liminality. The post-conflict city exist in a space where the activity – 'alarms' and 'sirens' – of the Troubles exists at the same time as the peace, 'as dust / clears.' Carson's late, minimalist approach clearly stepped in a poststructuralist direction, inviting readers to interpret meaning through the expression and exchange of their own and other ideas.

Let us consider then, as a case study Carson's poem simply entitled 'Belfast' from *Breaking News*. In 27 words he creates a fully realised contact zone, a shared space within which both communities are represented in a manner which allows for exchange and scrutiny. Carson depicts the city through a short series of seemingly simple, counterposed images:

'east

beyond the yellow  
shipyard cranes

a blackbird whistles  
in a whin bush

west

beside the motorway  
a black taxi

rusts in a field  
of blue thistles'

Each turn of phrase represents more than its whole by contextualisation, through metonym or, more poetically, kenning, but can still be summarised into binaries: beyond/beside, yellow cranes/black taxis, blue thistles/blackbirds, east/west. Carson's minimalist selection directly engages with the liminality of place and identity in the post-conflict city. These static images (there are only two verbs in the poem) manage to convey meaning to the collective memory and identity of Belfast. From the deep past, the Irish Gaelic tradition of the blackbird from 'The Blackbird of Belfast Lough' and the 'blue thistles' of Scottish origin derived from the Ulster Plantation, to the present day cranes of Harland and Wolff associated with East Belfast and compared with the black taxis of West Belfast and the Falls. Rather than explicitly referencing the loyalist/nationalist divide Carson draws this iconography from the depths of collective identity, presenting their meaning to the reader in a series of narrative steps like archival objects in a museum. They are not opposed but interwoven, offering ideas, reflections, counterpoints and dialogue in a shared space.

## Sinead Morrissey

Sinead Morrissey reflects the rapid, post-Agreement redevelopment of Belfast which sanitised its sectarian past and promoted 'neutral' narratives. This process of 'Titanicisation' has been, on its capitalist surface, a success; ever increasing investment and tourism pays tribute to the popularity of the story of the Titanic city (Heidemann 2016, 2). Conversely, it perverts the contact zone turning Belfast's past into a mythical, antebellum golden age. Morrissey's writing is deeply critical of the role that public forces pursue in guiding the city towards consumerism at the expense of reconciliation. In 'Tourism,' she explores how commercially driven changes deeply pervert the shared space. A new influx of visitors to the city could fulfil the Agreement's 'manufactured prophecy of spring' (2002, l. 5), but they are, literally, interested in seeing '... the festering gap in the shipyard / the Titanic made when it sank' (2002, ll. 17–18). From which Morrissey draws parallels between the ships and its souls, and Belfast and its citizens. Belfast is a 'splintered city' whose 'talent for holes that are bigger / then the things themselves' and is part of 'our off-beat, headstrong, suicidal charm.' (2002, ll. 13, 19–20, 25) Morrissey characterises the Titanic's relationship with the city as metonymic, the attributes of the tragedy stand in for Belfast.

In the poem 'Belfast', Morrissey foregrounds the presence of history in the shared space of the contemporary city. Morrissey puts the blame for the neutralisation of post-Agreement Belfast at the pedestal of the British dedicated to their capitalist 'Third Way'. (Kelly 2008, 548). Reaching across the contact zone is Belfast's past:

'Victoria Regina steering the ship of the City Hall  
in this the first and last of her intense provinces.' (2002, 2–3)

There had been three suspensions of devolution before 2002 lasting from a few hours to a couple of months – and in October 2002 a five-year suspension would commence – so the province of Northern Ireland kept returning to and leaving direct rule under Westminster. This new city is strange and unfamiliar to Morrissey. She illustrates this through the imagery of homelessness (the 'corners I have slept in' (2002, l. 15)). Moreover, she emphasises climactic change through climatic imagery and metaphor:

'... the city is making money  
on a weather mangled Tuesday.

While the house of the Transport Workers' Union  
fights the weight of the sky and manages  
to stay up. ...' (2002, ll. 7–10)

Belfast's past, the history of labourers, industry, and class hierarchy is figuratively faced with collapse and would increasingly disappear through the process of 'geopolitical eclipse' which subsequently gave way to Titanicisation. Morrissey establishes post-

Agreement Belfast as a liminal space between old and new economies; between the more nationalist, unionised past (that of James Connolly and Jim Larkin) and the new British way.

### Leontia Flynn

In her poetry Leontia Flynn unveils a vision not merely of Belfast but of the city and the peace itself. It is both the topic and setting, the shared space for the assessment of the meaning of identities in a post-conflict city. In 'Belfast', for example, Flynn foregrounds this intention clearly:

'The sky is a washed-out theatre backcloth  
Belfast is finished and Belfast is under construction' (2008, ll. 1–5).

Within both she addresses the process of urban-renewal be that construction — 'green sails of ... scaffolding' — or change through the development 'of arcades, mock-colonnades, church-spires and tapas bars' (2008, ll. 3–9) and expresses frustration, 'harsh attempts at buyable beauty?' (2008, l. 10). This is the frustration extant in the results of Titanicising the city, of changing Belfast to suit the outsider rather than question the problems inherent in the city. Consider this passage from 'Leaving Belfast':

'... you are leaving Belfast  
to its own devices; it will rise or fall,  
it will bury its own past, it will paper over the cracks  
with car parks and luxury flats, it will make itself new - or perhaps  
become the place it seemed before you lived here.' (2008, ll. 10–14)

This is the liminality of Belfast; fluidity which is both the old and the new. The process of Titanicising the city will only, metaphorically, 'paper over the cracks' (2008, l. 12) and if left unchecked it will only bury Belfast's past. From a shared space follows a shared future so, within her poetry, Flynn shifts gear from depicting the post-Agreement city to creating a shared space for reflection and critical thinking on collective memory and contingent identity.

The incongruities of the liminal space of post-Agreement Belfast, identities collide for Flynn in 'Belfast' as 'A match at Windsor Park has fallen in Gay Pride week.' (2008, l. 13) The lingering legacy of threat present in the post-conflict city is alluded to by her observation of music coming from two homes on the one street. The first plays 'We are the Billy Boys' an anthem of a number of generally Protestant football clubs, and while Flynn does not quote the lyrics of this song those aware of it will recognise that these include 'We're up to our knees in Fenian blood. / Surrender or you'll die'. While from the second home she can hear Patsy Cline's cover of Crazy:



'I'm crazy for trying  
And crazy for crying  
And I'm crazy for loving you.' (1961)

The inter-community violence of the Troubles lingers in the collective identities of the post-conflict city. Each song is a separate text, an object, pulled from Belfast's past and presented to express the narrative. Reading just beneath the surface, a quaint cross-community moment of two celebratory events (a football match and Pride) is laden with menace; the 'four doors' (2008, 16) between a metaphor for the liminal and shared space that post-Agreement Belfast occupies. It is also a shared space within which the reader may scrutinise the concept of the pre-Agreement Belfast. Flynn suggests that the present socially occurring shared space is more natural than the one constructed by the efforts of the city's elite:

'And gathering in the city's handful of bars,  
not sunk into darkness or swathed in beige leatherette  
men are talking about Walter Benjamin, and about 'Grand Narratives' which they seek  
to 'fracture' and interrogate' (2008, ll. 17–20).

It is ironic that, in the 'here and now' of the piece, it is the very academics that Flynn reflexively reads that analyse her now. The German philosopher Walter Benjamin is often cited as a thinker associated with discourse on the transitional nature of art (Kelly 2003, 549, 552). Problematising identity, however, is not intended to be a comfortable process. The reader, whether a football supporter of the Shankill or an academic at Queen's University, must recognise that their own identity is contingent on preconception and myth. Flynn's 'Belfast' sets the city as a stage, a shared space, upon which her audience may think critically about their own identity.

### Alan Gillis

What may pass for irreverence in the work of Alan Gillis hides the depth of his intimate familiarity with Belfast's 'bulletproof knickers' ('To Belfast, 2004, l. 1) Beneath his sardonic tone and flippant turns, he calls into question the problematic qualities of old identities. Gillis' personal experience of Belfast was of its shadow to the East, it was 'over there' but ever present, a shared space in which to find 'communal belonging' away from 'Ards'. In his writing there are clearly similarities to Carson's approach to the city, especially his manner of considering its urban topography to represent contested space between communities, identities, and progress.

In Gillis' work the act of observation is commonly associated with the city to express the search for meaning – the divination of a shared space. He builds ornate, often incredible images to express the awesome nature of the post-conflict city:

'I saw the jungle of gymnasium  
of cranes, slips and pulleys, the mangle of rusted hulks, iron mammoths  
still prowling with wan malice  
over the dockyard's dun immensity' ('Wasps', 2007, ll. 9–13)

The city's presence looms in piecemeal, it is observed and classified by a poetic taxonomy. Metaphorical objects, 'rusted hulks, iron mammoths', are objects displayed for the reader's interpretation. Similarly, in 'Lagan Weir' the pulse of rush-hour 'hurly-burlyed, / humdrummed traffic' ('Lagan Weir', 2007, l. 8) merges with the murmuration of starlings into a 'scatter-wheeling circus of shadows' (2007, l. 18) making their way homeward within the shared anonymising space of the city. He presents the city in a series of binaries that emphasise liminality: hawk/dove, traffic/river. Even the poem's title suggests a stark binary, a 'weir' literally representing a structure that splits a river, just as the Lagan, symbolically, bisects Belfast. The post-conflict city is in a transitional state from conflict to peace, and during the peace process itself, 'there'll be no quick fix.' (2007, l. 2) Gillis' Belfast poetry provides the topographic map of a shared space in 'Lagan Weir' but not a path through it. He stands 'in two minds' on a 'scuffed bridge' over a 'fudged river' (2007, ll. 6–8); he is at the intersection of an intersection from which he observes the process. Even prepared he fears 'things are going to get / a whole lot worse before they get better' (2007, 18).

Within this space Gillis questions identity and especially offers scrutiny of the collective identity of the city's loyalist community, problematising narratives associated with life in East Belfast. 'To Belfast' is an intentionally incomplete sestina, within the form there is repetition of the words 'grace' and 'trace'. Grace, I would argue is here utilised in a religious sense, the transmutation of divinity, given by God, observed in a form of deep understanding. Gillis sees public expressions of religion within a loyalist community context as 'warning messages' or instructions. It contextualises and informs an internal, categorical view of the community. Considered in this sense 'grace' as used in line 15 of the poem, is a religious metaphor for the passage of collective memory through community:

'Once in school, on a greaseproof page, we had to trace  
the busts and booms of your body, and I was ashamed to hand mine in because it  
lacked what Da called grace' (2004, ll. 13–15).

Gillis, however, is distressed to learn that the lesson of school is not the same as the lesson of the community and household; through education and shared space he sees and scrutinises his identity and understands it in a contingent way.

## Conclusion

The poetry of post-conflict Belfast provides a poetic framework that explores the 'shared' qualities of space, future, and society post-Agreement. By their textual nature, poems provide a meditative contrast to the cold, legalistic language of policy and governance in the peace process. Each piece presents a contact zone, a shared space within which the exchange of cultural identities freely transpires, which draws a clear parallel between poetry and public history: from a collective cultural cache, an archive of the (in)tangible, both construct a narrative for the enjoyment and interpretation of their audience. Over the Decade of Centenaries the focus on equal perspectives on history has often promoted separate, uncontextualised histories. The work of these contemporary Belfast poets, however, illustrates a novel approach to achieving the aims of peace building and commemoration. In their stanzas, the poets create a shared space – that borrows from a tangible and artistic Belfast – which emphasises scrutiny and cultural exchange; like the approach of a museum these poems display artifacts representative of life from the perspective of both communities for their audience to view, consider, and study. Poets will not replace public historians but we, and our museums, should embrace and explore more of the poetic. The deceptively simple craft of poetry deftly handles the creation of literary contact zones and by the inclusion of a little more art in their own processes the heritage sector may learn a valuable lesson in how to recontextualise Irish objects into the narrative of an 'inclusive and accepting society' which promotes the peace process.

## References

- Bennett, Tony. 2006. 'Civic Seeing: Museums and the Organization of Seeing'. In *A Companion to Museum Studies*, edited by Sharon MacDonald, 263–281. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Carson, Ciaran. 2008. *Collected Poems*. Oldcastle: Gallery Press.
- Clifford, James. 1997. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Cline, Patsy. 1961. 'Crazy.' Track 7. *Patsy Cline Showcase*. Decca Records.
- Community Relations Council. n. d. 'Decade Principles for Remembering in Public Spaces.' Accessed December 2019. <https://www.community-relations.org.uk/sites/crc/files/media-files/Decade%20Principles.pdf>.
- Flynn, Leonita. 2008. *Drives*. London: Cape Poetry.
- Gillis, Alan. 2004. *Somebody, Somewhere*. Oldcastle: Gallery Press.
- Gillis, Alan. 2007. *Hawks and Doves*. Oldcastle: Gallery Press.
- Heidemann, Birte. 2016. *Post-Agreement Northern Irish Literature: Lost In A Liminal Space?* Cham: Springer.
- Kelly, Aaron. 2005. 'Geopolitical Eclipse: Culture and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland'. *Third Text* 19. No. 5: 545–553.
- Kennedy-Andrews, Elmer. 2009. 'Introduction: For All I Know; Ciaran Carson in Interview with Elmer Kennedy-Andrews'. In *Ciaran Carson: Critical Essays*, edited by Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, 13–28. Dublin: Four Courts Press.
- Morrissey, Sinead. 2002. *Between Here and There*. Manchester: Carcanet Press.
- Office for the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. 2005. "A Shared Future: Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland." Accessed March 2020. <https://www.niacro.co.uk/sites/default/files/publications/A%20Shared%20Future-%20OFMDFM-Mar%202005.pdf>.

# LIVES, LANDSCAPES AND THE LEGACY OF THE PAST

Cheryl Lawther & Luke Moffett



# LIVES, LANDSCAPES AND THE LEGACY OF THE PAST

## Abstract

Despite recent efforts to examine economic, social and cultural rights violations during and post-conflict, the issue of land has often been on the periphery of transitional justice debates. Indeed, in Northern Ireland, the issue of segregation and land ownership has been seen as a separate issue to broader 'legacy' issues, often being overshadowed by debates on victims' rights to justice, truth and reparation. Focusing on the historic role that land and housing have played in Northern Ireland's conflict and ongoing political breakdown and social disorder, this article seeks to correct this omission. Based on qualitative research with those on the receiving end of displacement and exile during the Northern Ireland conflict – including victims and survivors, planners and community leaders, this article develops a fourfold analysis of the relationship between violence, land, identity and dealing with the past in a transitional context. The following themes are explored: displacement, identity and uprootedness; displacement, place and space; displacement, victimhood and trauma; and displacement, redress and the past in the present. The conclusions are relevant for Northern Ireland and other transitional contexts.

KEYWORDS: *Land, conflict, legacy, redress*

## Introduction

Despite recent efforts in the transitional justice field to examine economic, social and cultural rights violations during and post-conflict, the issue of land has often been on the periphery of these debates.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in Northern Ireland the issue of segregation and land ownership has been seen as a separate issue to broader 'legacy' issues, often being overshadowed by debates on policing, prisoners, criminal justice and truth recovery. Focusing on the historic role that land and housing have played in Northern Ireland's conflict and ongoing political breakdown and social disorder, this paper seeks to correct this omission. Based on qualitative research with those on the receiving end of displacement and exile during the Northern Ireland conflict, this paper develops a fourfold analysis of the relationship between victims of violence, land, identity and dealing with the past in a contested/transitional context. The following themes are explored: displacement, identity and uprootedness; displacement, place and space; displacement, victimhood and trauma; and displacement, redress and the past in the present. The conclusions are relevant for Northern Ireland and other transitional contexts.

---

1. The term transitional justice refers to the range of processes and mechanisms that are associated with a society's attempt to deal with a legacy of large-scale human rights abuses. Reconciliation is a key aim of transitional justice and is often linked to the achievement of truth, justice, reparations and other forms of 'making peace' with the past.



The fieldwork on which this paper is based was conducted in Northern Ireland between October 2019 and February 2020.<sup>2</sup> It involved six focus groups with members of local communities along the border and eight interviews with victims of forced displacement and representatives of victims' organisations and NGOs in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. Both purposeful and snowball sampling methods were used. In total, some fifty seven individuals were engaged with. While this is not a representative sample, our objective was to capture some of the general sentiments relating to displacement and the impact of violence on land tenure, housing and redress schemes during and after the Northern Ireland conflict. Moreover, our focus on rural areas was designed to counter the existing focus on displacement in urban centres and on which a substantive body of literature exists. The qualitative work was complemented by collection of quantitative data on displacement and compensation during the Troubles/ conflict held by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, along with archival newspaper searches, facilitated by the political collection held in the archives in Belfast's Linen Hall Library.

### **Displacement, identity and uprootedness**

Housing and land have historically been rooted in grievances that have led to conflict in Ireland. There are geographical, historical and economic dimensions to where people settled and how communities divided up space in Northern Ireland. Members of the Catholic population were often more in the majority in the south and west of what is now Northern Ireland and on poorer land and often not industrialised, due to discrimination in land and employment as a result of the Plantation and Protestant ascendancy (Cameron Report 1969; Elliott 2001). While the Government of Ireland Act 1921 partitioned Ireland with the formation of Northern Ireland to avoid a civil war after the 1916 Easter Rising, violence then and today continues to spill over the border (Ferriter 2019).

One of the causes of the Troubles/conflict in and around Northern Ireland was the grievance around gerrymandering and discrimination of housing allocation. This meant that housing was allocated on the basis of political voting intentions and community allegiance, rather than housing need. This discrimination is typified by the 'Caledon incident' on 20 July 1968, when a Nationalist MP at Stormont, Austin Currie, 'squatted' in a house that had been allocated to an unmarried Protestant woman over a Catholic family who had three young children and whose house had been condemned as unsanitary for years.<sup>3</sup> This denial of rights made Catholics feel like second-class citizens

---

2. This fieldwork formed part of a broader project commissioned by the World Bank as part of its Flagship Study on Land, Conflict and Inclusion. A more detailed report on these issues written by the authors is entitled "'No Longer Neighbours" – The Impact of Violence on Land, Housing and Redress in the Northern Ireland Conflict' (Reparations, Responsibility and Victimhood project, Queen's University Belfast, 2020). We wish to Professor Robin Hickey, Dr Andrew Godden and Dr Kevin Hearty their invaluable contributions to that work.

3. RTE, 'Civil Rights in Northern Ireland – Caledon Protest' <<https://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1031-civil-rights-movement-1968-9/1032-caledon-protest/>> accessed 12 November 2019.

in a Protestant dominated government, which pushed many to campaign for their civil rights under the auspices of the NI Civil Rights Association (NICRA). However the attacks on NICRA protests and marches, notably on unfair housing allocation in October 1968 in Derry, were met with police and loyalist violence, culminating in 1972 in what would become known as 'Bloody Sunday', where fourteen civilians were killed and dozens injured, setting the tone that sectarian violence was the 'accepted norm' and ended peaceful protest as a means of societal transformation (Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association 1978).

The most notable displacements that occurred during the start of the Troubles were in Belfast, which had a long history of sectarian riots that resulted in the displacement of hundreds of families before the conflict began (Darby 1986).<sup>4</sup> This experience of displacement and sectarian attacks maintained a communal memory of collective security in people's minds and thus the necessity for segregation (Boal, Murray and Poole 1976). However, the displacement of tens of thousands of families between 1969–1976 represented an unprecedented large-scale movement of people often in the space of a few days, with 3,500 families forced from their homes in the first few days of houses being burnt in August 1969 (McCann 2019). Between 1969–1973, approximately 30,000 to 60,000 individuals were forced from their homes in Belfast amounting to 6.6 percent to 11.8 percent of the total population of the city at the time, representing the biggest forced displacement of a civilian population after the Second World War in Western Europe.<sup>5</sup> Thousands fled across the border, Great Britain or further afield.

More broadly with the displacement of thousands of families, violence spread into territorial control. For the most part, the pattern of population movements often followed a defensive one, wherein mixed families or minority Catholic or Protestant families often moved to estates dominated by their own community (Boal et al. 1976). The size of the community was also governed by the 'defensive need to be able to recognise everyone who lived in it and therefore in times of conflict to immediately recognise strangers' (Weiner 1976, 77). This segregation cemented community identity and 'otherness' that continues today. Some 477 persons were forced from their homes in sectarian attacks in 2017/18 and 377 in 2018/19 because they came from 'the other' community or because of tensions with a local paramilitary group.<sup>6</sup> During the Troubles and today, arson and gun attacks on businesses, community halls and churches violently expressed that members of this community were no longer welcome in the area and sought to make their social life unliveable. Not only did this have a long-term impact on the economy of Northern Ireland but it also served to fuel social mistrust between the two communities (O'Leary 2019).

---

4. In 1835, 1857, 1864, 1872, 1886, 1898, 1920–22 and 1935.

5. Intimidation in Housing Community Relations Council 1974.

6. There is a continuing trend of around 400 individuals being put out of their homes since 2012.

## Displacement, place and space

While the impact of segregated living space in Northern Ireland has been examined elsewhere (see for example: Shirlow and Murtagh 2006), what is particularly interesting for our purposes here is how in keeping with other situations of violent conflict across the world, 'cultures of violence' and abnormal patterns of thought, behaviour and movement became normalised and routinised in Northern Ireland in the quest to maintain everyday life (see for example: Steenkamp 2005, 2014). A number of different manifestations can be identified. For example, and one which illustrates how conflict affected people's use of the land, home life, movement patterns and working practices, in the border region of South Armagh a 'watchful architecture' of hill top observation posts, manned military checkpoints and daily British Army foot patrols and helicopter flights intruded on everyday life for local people (Carr 2011). Life in the area was further disrupted by security policies of closing, and in some cases even blowing up, border roads and bridges, with many in the area having the easiest and most natural means of access to family, churches, farmsteads, and schools just over the border cut off (Harvey, Kelly and McGearty 2005). Alternatively, one interviewee, a former member of the security forces alluded to how:

'when I went to bed at night my pistol was sitting on the bedside locker beside the bed and then even when I got married and moved up to Sion Mills it was the same, I went to bed with the wife, I went to bed with my pistol [laughs], but that was part and parcel of the job.'<sup>7</sup>

Despite the Belfast Agreement and peace process, such movement patterns continue to exist:

'It would have been, even to this day there's places you still wouldn't go to, you didn't go at the time and you wouldn't go now. I'm not speaking for anybody else but I certainly wouldn't go to some of those places yet – simple as that.'<sup>8</sup>

They have also extended into practices in the workplace:

'We go into this neutral workspace and we don't talk about that we've lost and we've hurt and we've all this trauma. You just get on with it because it's the Northern Ireland way... that's part of our culture. Our culture is don't fuckin' talk about it and don't tell anybody and keep your mouth shut.'<sup>9</sup>

In more urban areas, the painting of wall murals and kerb stones and the erection of communal flags has been used as a way to demarcate territory. The building of 'peace

---

7. NID05, Newtownstewart, November 2019. For a broader discussion on the experience of the Protestant community in the border counties of Northern Ireland, see for example, Donnan (2005) and Donnan and Simpson (2007).

8. NID04, Fermanagh, November 2019

9. NID08, Belfast, January 2020.

walls' between communities and particular 'flash point' areas have also featured heavily in the post-conflict landscape. Indeed, recent research by Byrne, Gormley-Hennan, Morrow, Sturgeon (2015), demonstrates that for affected communities, peace walls are still understood to be a protective necessity. Their research found that some 70 percent of Protestants and 58 percent of Catholics acknowledged that an important function of the peace wall was to make them feel safer and more than three quarters of all respondents said that they felt very or fairly safe in the shadow of the wall (Byrne et al. 2015). Conversely, the majority of respondents on both sides of the community expressed significant anxiety that both sectarian and anti-social behaviour would increase should the nearest peace wall be removed, with 48 percent 'very worried' or 'fairly worried' about the ability of the police to maintain order in that situation. Even more starkly, the proportion of people wanting local peace walls to come down some time in the future, had decreased from 44 percent in 2012 to 35 percent in 2015 (Byrne et al. 2015).

### **Displacement, victimhood and trauma**

The growing international attention to the impact of displacement and the loss of land and homes in transitional justice research and practice attests to its traumatic impact (see for example, Walker, Bohlin, Hall and Kepe 2010; Duthie and Seils 2016). Yet, while most of the literature on the Northern Ireland conflict concentrates on the physical and to a lesser extent the psychological impact of the violence, there remains little analysis of its effect on peoples' relationship with land, community and social space. One of the most salient issues we wish to raise here is the trauma that results from displacement and intimidation.

Interviewees in Northern Ireland were highly attuned to the traumatic impact of both land and housing intimidation and the impact of displacement. While experiences are highly individualised, some common themes can be detected. For example, reflecting on the loss of a husband and farm owner, one research participant described 'looking across the farm to see the mountains and the fields full of bodies', indicating a level of trauma that has not yet been recognised or addressed.<sup>10</sup> Others spoke of the trauma of sudden displacement, the loss of one's 'home' and community networks and the speed and threat or actuality of direct violence that often accompanied displacement. Perhaps most strikingly, in 2016, the Belfast based WAVE Trauma Centre which works with victims and survivors of the conflict reported that 50 percent of their current referrals are the result of ongoing paramilitary intimidation (The Detail 2016). As Browne (2019) notes, those most impacted by present-day violent displacement are usually people living at the sharp edge of Northern Ireland's transition.

In other cases, the failure to address issues of land restitution and reparation in any of the major initiatives designed to 'deal with' the past – the Report of the Consultative

---

10. Author's field notes

Group on the Past (2009), the Haass-O'Sullivan report (2013), the Stormont House Agreement (2014), the Fresh Start Agreement or the New Decade, New Approach Agreement, promoted a sense across interviewees that they had been 'abandoned' and that politicians were 'not interested' in their experiences and that the government 'want victims to go away and die' (Northern Ireland Office 2020). Indeed, as some commentators have argued, those who were displaced are likely to remain hidden or forgotten victims of the conflict (Browne and Asprooth-Jackson 2019). Interviewees in both urban and rural areas spoke to these dynamics. 'Pauline', who moved to the Republic of Ireland thirty years ago, as a result of security force intimidation, is one of 22,290 Northern-born people living in a southern Border county, spoke to this experience:

'We have never been acknowledged as victims of war. This contributes to people's negative view of us. If people were more aware of our experiences and why we were forced to leave our homes in the North, their attitudes would change. Anyone with a sense of humanity and justice would see us for what we are' (Irish Times 2005).

### **Displacement, redress and the past in the present**

The final issue we wish to address is that of displacement, redress and the continuing presence of the past in the present. The creation of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in 1971 addressed some of the grievances around political bias in the allocation of social housing by providing houses on the basis of need rather than political affiliation. Yet to minimise threats to applicants they would be moved to new homes in estates within their own community. The Belfast Agreement (1998) does not deal expressly with land or housing matters. The subsection on Reconciliation uses 'initiatives to facilitate and promote... mixed housing' to exemplify 'the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society', which is identified as an 'essential aspect' of the reconciliation process, but no institutions or processes were established to address displacement, resettlement or redistribution. Efforts to encourage mixed housing developments in Belfast continue to be subject to sectarian attacks as paramilitaries continue to exert their social control over communities (BBC 2019).

During the conflict, while compensation or rehousing was often readily accepted by some displaced families, many others found it to be inadequate. The UK Government paid out some £990,372,313 in criminal damage between 1968–2003, which included houses, businesses, cars and other property damaged during the Troubles.<sup>11</sup> During the Troubles the Irish Government made a number of provisions for redress for those affected by the violence. Between 1975–1982 the Irish Government paid out £10 million

---

11. Appendix 1 Memorandum submitted by the Northern Ireland Office and the Compensation Agency, Northern Ireland Affairs - Fourth Report, Session 2003 - 2004.

in compensation to local authorities in Ireland that had suffered damage to property.<sup>12</sup> As Greer and Mitchell argue, such compensation for criminal damage was a 'public good' that required the 'maintenance of the social and economic life of the province in the face of unprecedented damage and destruction' (Greer and Mitchell 1982, 325). However the provision of compensation or rehousing through the NIHE meant that people either moved to a more majority dominated area of their community or left the country all together.

Some commentators have found that any sort of land restitution needs to go beyond resolving individual housing and compensation issues to consider the 'social, economic and environmental dimensions' of housing development and planning during the Troubles (Coyles 2017, 719). O'Leary (2019) suggests that housing, land and property ownership continue to be a consequence of British colonialism over the past eight centuries, that cannot be completely redressed by subsequent generations, but its effects can be mitigated and society transformed through power-sharing and equality of opportunity. Despite the creation of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and constitutional reform of governance structures, they have perhaps neglected remedying the social and spatial consequences of the violence, such as social isolation, segregation and community detachment.

Homes play a key 'role in grounding identity and giving family members a sense of origin, place, and rootedness' (Kutz 2004, 307). However it is questionable the extent to which returning people's land or property can restore their sense of belonging or the lost opportunity to raise a family on their ancestral homestead (Binder and Murithi 2013). In Northern Ireland the two communities continue to physically and socially segregate themselves, which compensation of land and rehousing has only reinforced for the purposes of security and peace (Community Relations Council 2008). Notwithstanding this, a needs assessment of victims coming forward for support to the Victims and Survivors Service in 2014 found that 17 percent had housing needs, similar to the 19 percent coming forward for truth, justice and acknowledgment needs, indicating that housing needs remain unresolved for many victims (RSM McClure Watters 2015). In sum, redressing displacement in Northern Ireland has taken an individual and homogenising approach which prioritises peace and security over reconciliation.

---

12. Irish Department of Foreign Affairs (1984), Relief of distress in Northern Ireland: Northern Ireland refugees, 2014/32/2058.



## Conclusion

Housing and land continue to physically and geographically demarcate the continuing historical divide in Northern Ireland. While it would be over-ambitious to suggest that two decades of peace would allow Northern Ireland to move into more of a 'shared space', the correlation between identity and collective community security has left a legacy of deep-felt social mistrust with regard to 'the other'. Although peace walls are the most physical manifestation of segregation, there remains a serious unease and sense of vulnerability amongst some communities who continue to feel at risk of intimidation and threatened displacement by their neighbours. This reflects an ongoing lack of social reconciliation where many people are made to feel that they are unwanted or seen as coming from elsewhere, ignoring their right to live in peace in their chosen place of residence. This is not simply a result of conflict, but reflects a long history, still in many people's minds, about their origin and identity connection with the land.

## References

- Binder, Judith and Tim Murithi. 2013. 'Home at last: Land conflicts in Burundi and the right of victims to reparations.' *The Institute for Justice & Reconciliation Policy Brief* 11: 1–18.
- BBC. 2019. 'Belfast man's home targeted in "sectarian attack"'. *BBC News*, October 15. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-50061899>
- Boal, Frederick, Russell Murray and Michael Poole. 1976. 'Belfast: The Urban Encapsulation of a National Conflict'. In *Urban Ethnic Conflict: A Comparative Perspective*, edited by Susan Clarke and Jeffrey Obler, 77–133. Chapel Hill: Institute for Research in Social Science, University of North Carolina.
- Browne, Brendan. 2019. 'The Troubles: tens of thousands of people were violently displaced in Northern Ireland'. *The Conversation*, February 21. <https://theconversation.com/the-troubles-tens-of-thousands-of-people-were-violently-displaced-in-northern-ireland-111764>
- Browne, Brendan and Casey Asprooth-Jackson. 2019. 'From 1969 to 2018: Relocating historical narratives of displacement during "the Troubles" through the European migrant crisis'. *Capital and Class* 43(1): 23–38.
- Byrne, Jonny, Cathy Gormley-Heenan, Duncan Morrow and Brendan Sturgeon. 2015. *Public Attitudes to Peace Walls (2015). Survey Results*. Ulster University: Department of Justice.
- Cameron Report. 1969. *Disturbances in Northern Ireland: report of the Commission appointed by the Governor of Northern Ireland: presented to Parliament by Command of His Excellency the Governor of Northern Ireland, September 1969*. Belfast: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.
- Carr, Garrett. 2011. 'The map of watchful architecture'. *EchoGeo* 18: 1–12.
- Community Relations Council. 2008. *Towards Sustainable Security: Interface Barriers and the Legacy of Segregation in Belfast*. Belfast: Community Relations Council.
- Consultative Group on the Past. 2009. *Report of the Consultative Group on the Past*. London: Northern Ireland Office.
- Coyles, David. 2017. 'The security-threat-community'. *City* 21(6): 699–723.

## References

- Darby, John. 1986. *Intimidation and the Control of Conflict in Northern Ireland*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Donnan, Hastings. 2005. 'Material identities: fixing ethnicity in the Irish borderlands.' *Identities: global studies in culture and power* 12(1): 69–105.
- Donnan, Hastings and Kirk Simpson. 2007. 'Silence and Violence among Northern Ireland Border Protestants.' *Ethnos* 72(1): 5–28.
- Duthie, Roger and Paul Seils. 2016. *The case for action on transitional justice and displacement*. New York: International Center for Transitional Justice.
- Elliott, Marianne. 2001. *The Catholics of Ulster: A History*. London: Penguin.
- Ferriter, Diarmaid. 2019. *The Border: The Legacy of a Century of Anglo-Irish Politics*. London: Profile Books.
- Greer, Des and Valerie Mitchell. 1982. *Compensation for criminal damage to property*. Belfast: SLS Legal.
- Harvey, Brian, Assumpta Kelly and Sean McGearty. 2005. *The Emerald Curtain: The Social Impact of the Irish Border*. Carrickmacross: Triskele Community Training and Development.
- Haass, Richard and Meghan O'Sullivan. 2013. *An Agreement Among the Parties of the Northern Ireland Executive on Parades, Select Commemorations, and Related Protests; Flags and Emblems; and Contending with the Past*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Office.
- Irish Times. 2005. 'Forgotten refugees in their own country.' *Irish Times*, 4 May. **<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/forgotten-refugees-in-their-own-country-1.437499>**
- Kutz, Christopher. 2004. 'Justice in Reparations: The Cost of Memory and the Value of Talk.' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 32(2): 277–312.
- McCann, Michael. 2019. *Burnt Out: How the Troubles Began*. Cork: Mercier Press.
- Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. 1978. 'WE SHALL OVERCOME' *The History of the Struggle for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland 1968–1978*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association.

## References

Northern Ireland Office. 2014. *Stormont House Agreement*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Office. Northern Ireland Office. 2020. *New Decade, New Approach*. Belfast: Northern Ireland Office.

O'Leary, Brendan. 2019. *A Treatise on Northern Ireland, Volume I: Colonialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

RSM McClure Watters. 2015. *Impact of the Victim Support Programme, Prepared for the Commission for Victims and Survivors*. Belfast: Commission for Victims and Survivors.

Shirlow, Pete and Brendan Murtagh. 2006. *Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City*. London: Pluto Press.

Steenkamp, Christina. 2005. 'The Legacy of War: Conceptualizing a "Culture of Violence" to Explain Violence after Peace Accords'. *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 94(379): 253–267.

Steenkamp, Christina. 2014. *Violent societies: networks of violence in civil war and peace*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

The Detail. 2016. 'Government challenged to take action over scale of paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland'. *The Detail*, April 29. <https://www.thedetail.tv/articles/hundreds-still-being-victimised-by-paramilitaries-each-year>

Walker, Cheryl, Anna Bohlin, Ruth Hall and Themela Kepe. 2010. *Land, Memory, Reconstruction, and Justice: Perspectives on Land Restitution in South Africa: Perspectives on Land Claims in South Africa*. Ohio: Ohio University Press.

Weiner, Ron. 1976. *The Rape and Plunder of the Shankill in Belfast: people and planning*. Belfast: Nothems Press

# WOMEN'S POLITICAL VISUALISATION OF POST-CONFLICT BELFAST: COMMUNITY- LED PARTICIPATORY PHOTOGRAPHY AS A MEANS OF HIGHLIGHTING SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES AFFECTING INTERFACE AREAS OF THE CITY

Jolene Mairs Dyer



# WOMEN'S POLITICAL VISUALISATION OF POST-CONFLICT BELFAST: COMMUNITY-LED PARTICIPATORY PHOTOGRAPHY AS A MEANS OF HIGHLIGHTING SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES AFFECTING INTERFACE AREAS OF THE CITY

## Abstract

In late 2014, a group of women who live in the predominantly Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist Tigers Bay and a community worker from the predominantly Catholic-Nationalist-Republican New Lodge interface areas of North Belfast worked with each other to offer visual representations of their localities as a means of highlighting socio-economic issues affecting both regions of the post-conflict city. This visualisation took the form of a photobook 'Women's Vision from Across the Barricades' (2015) containing images and text taken and co-edited by the participants.

The contemporary post-conflict context represents a wider socio-political culture of promoting external investment and economic growth in the city of Belfast, often represented by the redevelopment of the Titanic Quarter; yet little direct dividends have been felt or experienced by communities most affected by the conflict (Doyle and McAreavey 2014; Rallings 2014). O'Dowd and Komarova (2013, 528) suggest that Belfast is often viewed as an exemplar 'contested city'. In addition, they outline two additional emergent ideological framings of the city: the 'new capitalist' (ibid., 529) and 'shared city' narratives (ibid., 536). This article will consider this project in relation to these narratives. It will argue that the women's visual engagement with their locality demonstrates that gendered political memory remains embedded within the physical structures of interface areas of the city. Overall, it will argue that this project is an example of grassroots activism led by women that contributes to the ongoing process of reconciliation by generating shared socio-economic objectives alongside challenging the exclusion of women from local power structures.

**KEYWORDS:** *Northern Ireland, Belfast, post-conflict, women, gender, peacebuilding, collaborative, participatory photography*



## Introduction and context

In late 2014, a group of women who live in the predominantly Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist Tigers Bay and a community worker from the predominantly Catholic-Nationalist-Republican New Lodge interface areas of North Belfast worked with each other to offer visual representations of their localities as a means of highlighting political issues affecting both regions of the post-conflict city. This visualisation took the form of a photobook 'Women's Vision from Across the Barricades', published and publicly launched at Duncairn Centre for Culture and Arts in North Belfast in October 2015, containing images and text taken and co-edited by the participants. The women aimed to use the photobook as a visual accompaniment to their existing community activism. They also intended to use it as an additional lobbying tool in order to highlight urgent socio-economic issues they felt were being overlooked and neglected by local power structures. They also wanted to challenge their lack of inclusion in decision-making on issues such as housing and employment relevant to their localities. To that end, the photobook finished with a set of 'demands' or objectives centred around key socio-economic issues i.e. barricades, housing, employment, women-centred services and meaningful community consultation.

The project emerged out a meeting between myself (a practice-led researcher at Ulster University) and Eileen Weir, (Good Relations Coordinator at Shankill Women's Centre and founder of the Greater North Belfast Women's Network) at a conference on the role of women in peacebuilding. Shankill Women's Centre is a key voluntary organisation, established by a group of women in 1987 that offers educational and training opportunities to women in the Shankill area and beyond. One of its programmes, Greater North Belfast Women's Network (GNBWG) aims to foster cross-community collaboration between women's groups in that region. Eileen suggested working with one such group as a means of highlighting 'issues affecting their area.' The group was Lower North Belfast Women's Group (LNBWG), comprised of women who live in Tigers Bay, who also participate in the Greater North Belfast Women's Network. The 6 women, mostly in their 30s with young families, had a vested interest in community development and were already actively organising community events and signposting relevant services to local residents. Alongside LNBWG, Margaret Valente of Star Neighbourhood Centre in New Lodge, also a contributor to the network, participated in the project both as a photographer and co-facilitator. The women viewed the visual elements that I could bring to their work as an additional means of highlighting and making visible, experiences and socio-economic issues still present in interface areas of post-conflict Belfast that were being subsumed under new capitalist and neo-liberal reframings of the city (Baker and McLaughlin 2010; O'Dowd and Komarova 2013). The current context of post-conflict Belfast represents a wider political culture of promoting external investment and economic growth in Northern Ireland, often represented by the redevelopment of the Titanic Quarter; yet little direct dividends have been felt or experienced by communities most affected by the conflict (Doyle and McAreavey 2014; Rallings 2014; O'Dowd and Komarova 2013; Baker and McLaughlin

2010; NISRA 2017). Murtagh and Keaveney (2006, 187–188) argue that this 'twin-speed economy has produced an increasingly bifurcated place, where new layers of disadvantage are placed over old patterns of sectarian enmity and political fatalism' and that 'the other Belfast is stratified by poverty, ethno-religious segregation and fear and is more spatially fixed in the sink estates of the inner and outer city'. Tigers Bay and New Lodge are two areas within North Belfast marked out as deprived wards that have experienced, and continue to experience, high levels of poverty, violence and social exclusion' (Fay et al. 1999; NISRA 2017). Both run parallel to Duncairn Gardens, a main thoroughfare that separates each region, with so-called peacewalls or gated entries providing access between the two.

Within this context, grassroots women's movements developed in response to the political, social, economic, ethno-national and gendered challenges posed by the conflict, and in relation to ongoing societal issues pertinent to women such as pay equality, access to education and employment and childcare. Challenges particular to post-conflict societies include wider structural complexities that impede and restrict the role of women, and in particular, the tendency to render them invisible either by reducing their contribution to the conflict or by limiting their role in addressing it. As Stapleton and Wilson (2014, 2073) suggest:

In contexts of ethno-national conflict, women are typically positioned as victims, as peacemakers or as supporting players. These positions reflect normatively gendered categories and characteristics. Crucially, they also undermine the notion of women as active participants within the conflict situation. Hence women's engagement in wars and other conflicts is often invisible to external observers.

At a more localised level, Ward (2013, para. 1) suggests that women in Northern Ireland have been excluded and silenced not only in relation to their role in the conflict, but also in their actual and potential contribution to 'support(ing) the transition out of conflict'. As Ashe (2009, 311) points out, 'given women's under-representation in formal political arenas in Northern Ireland (...), it is important that theorists chart their involvement at the level of civil society organisations and make women's political and communal agency visible'. This article redresses this invisibility by making visible, literally and figuratively, the activity and agency of women who are engaged in dealing with the on-going legacy of conflict in Northern Ireland.

### **Visual research process and collaborative protocols**

In terms of methodology, the project adopted a collaborative approach, adapted from my previous work on audiovisual projects that included contrasting and competing trauma narratives and interpretations of contested sites in the same filmic and exhibitive spaces (Mairs Dyer, 2014; Mairs Dyer, 2013; Mairs, 2013; Mairs and McLaughlin, 2012). Drawing upon this and similar research, which confirms that collaborative

protocols can be effective when exhibiting and (re)presenting contrasting narratives in post-conflict contexts (McLaughlin, 2010; Lundy and McGovern, 2006; Healing through Remembering, 2005); from the outset, this project was premised on the notion of shared ownership of both the individual photographic work and the final outcome, which was in this case, a photobook. In addition, each individual and participating group maintained the right to withdraw from the project at any time. Whilst this approach is not without limitations (Mairs Dyer 2013; Hackett and Rolston 2009; Lundy and McGovern 2006), it provides participants with 'a sense of safety and control and ha(s) the effect of maintaining engagement' (Mairs Dyer 2013, 239).

Active participation in the creative process of photography fostered a sense of empowerment amongst the participants. It ensured the development and consolidation of new skills and provided a creative means of expression and representation. In a follow-up feedback session with project participants held in October 2019, one participant stated, 'I think the fact (we) were taught how to take photographs was something that was new, and it was that type of artistic outcome to it. It wasn't just about talking about what (we) wanted sorted. (We) actually went out and took photographs of what it was that (we) were unhappy about. It was about (...) our social expression through photographs because (we) were unable (...) to get around the table to voice these and that's why the book really came about.'

### **Gendered political revisualisation**

The overall title chosen by the group for the photobook 'Women's Vision from Across the Barricades', perhaps at once suggests the dominance of the contested city narrative, with the literal 'eyeing each other from across public space' (O'Dowd and Komarova 2013, 537) and a sense of looking 'at' 'the other,' and 'this is how we/you look from here'. It is a vision that is at once obstructed and mediated by physical, social and economic barriers. The domination of the physical presence of barricades is exemplified by the images taken and selected for inclusion.

The text in the photobook that accompanies Figure 1 reads:

'This is the only gate monitored by a surveillance camera used to go in and out of Tigers Bay. It opens at 7am and closes at 5.30pm. This means that local residents have to walk an extra half-mile to use shops after the gates close. With consultation between statutory bodies and local residents, we may be able to achieve extended opening hours and improve security.'

Modifiers used to describe the gate such as 'monitored', 'surveillance', 'have to' and 'security', express limitation and restriction, which is embodied by the physicality of the environment, which acts as a:

'Powerful means of engendering strategic control. It lends the area an air of uncanniness; it is clear that it is highly securitized, but it is unclear to what extent and to what end (...) reinforcing the position of power held by the unidentified surveillor [sic]. This also enhances the sense of deterritorialization—the surveillor [sic] is anonymous, distant, and operates “from above” and outside the site in question. (...) The presence of (surveillance) (...) engenders a pervasive sense of impending disorder (and its punishment). The very structures and functions of these mechanisms act as artefacts of past and future (or predicted) violence (Mitchell and Kelly 2011, 318).

The image and text combine to demonstrate that such structures communicate to residents that they are unpredictable and therefore subject to control, containment and surveillance. This sense of threat emanates not only from inter and intra-community relations, but also from within the physicality of the city environment.



*Fig. 1*

Socio-economic exclusion, with a sense of looking out towards a wider city context and their respective distance from, and perception of, it, is most pertinently represented by the image selected for the cover of the photobook:

Figure 2 shows Tigers Bay in the foreground with the iconic structures of Harland and Woolf shipyard cranes and the Titanic building in the newly established quarter of the same name in the background. Harland and Woolf could be said to represent Northern Ireland's industrial past, where ship manufacturing was the cornerstone of secure employment, particularly for Protestant men. This vision of the old Belfast, with



its emphasis on production, dependable jobs for the working-classes, sits beside new capitalist Belfast, and its promise of the city's integration into globalised structures of international tourism and the emergent service industry. Its positioning in the background as a slightly blurred, almost ethereal chimera highlights its physical proximity, yet simultaneous distance. It is a visualisation of Murtagh and Keaveney's (2006, 187) 'bifurcated' city alongside the:

'Conceptual and practical differentiation of the city centre from the peripheral inner-city residential areas (that) treats these working-class areas as scapegoats, as though they are vessels in which the division and sectarianism that pervades most of Northern Irish society can (and should) be contained. In so doing, policy labels 'interface' areas and characterises them as focal points for hostile interactions, entrenching this term in the lexicon. This attitude advocates a protectionist stance towards the city centre, without recognising that it is a space like any other— socially constructed, fluid and vulnerable to contestation' (Rallings 2014, 437).

In the follow-up event held with project participants in October 2019, one participant stated the photobook played an essential role in highlighting, 'where money seems to be invested in tourism and nothing is really being invested that much within the communities that actually bore the brunt of the conflict.' Another stated, 'There's no transformation. There's no benefit for us.' Another confirmed that 'what (the book) highlights is the lack of transformation in Northern Ireland in certain areas. (...) Other



Fig. 2

places have been transformed but look what we're (...) living in.' Another stated 'you can see the big buildings (...) in the mist (but) this is unobtainable from Tigers Bay and New Lodge. It's not even a mile away when you're looking across the loch.' A further participant stated, 'I think (the photobook) showed what our areas were like. We showed how near Titanic Quarter was and the jobs and (drew attention to the urgent need for) women's services and youth services.'

Ongoing social discontent and the absence of a sense direct benefit from the purported prosperity of the post-conflict era is perhaps most apparent in images that highlight the use of public space in Tigers Bay:



**Fig 3**



**Fig 4**

Accompanying text here reads, 'houses were pulled down from the area of Tigers Bay over 10 years ago with promise of new houses going up. This is a disused space that could be used for social housing.' Figure 4 reads, 'From April onwards each year this derelict area is used a bonfire site.'

Since the publication of the photobook, the site has now been re-purposed for social housing. At the follow-up event a participant stated, 'we don't have a bonfire site in Tigers Bay. There's nowhere to have it. But it's better because we're getting housing. (...) They're in the process of building twelve three-bedroom and eight two-bedroom (houses).' Whilst it cannot be claimed that this was a direct result of the publication of the photobook, what is apparent is that the act of its production created a narrative of shared community objectives that contributed to achieving their intended outcomes. In addition, as outlined earlier, there is a distinct tendency towards rendering women's contribution to the conflict and its resolution invisible. This is reinforced by the demarcation of specific regions of the city as areas of male domination and control. Visual modes of commemoration, in particular plaques and murals, tend to focus on male agency and activity. The section of the photobook entitled 'public space and commemoration' represents the city space as one of gendered iconography and



symbolism:



*Fig 5*



*Fig 6*



*Fig 7*

Figure 5 reads, 'this memorial depicts the 1941 Second World War Belfast Blitz. Our areas are more deprived now than they were back then.' The mural itself emphasises male activity and class structures, showing a milkman carrying out his duties amidst the material destruction of the city alongside male soldiers listening benignly to a woman in the supportive, placating and diverting role of playing the piano. Similarly, figure 6 shows how New Lodge's iconisation of Bobby Sands, is framed and positioned, as the accompanying text confirms, on top of the Barrack Flats in New Lodge so that his image 'can be seen across the city' in order to 'highlight issues within the nationalist community such as the hunger strikes in the early 1980s.' These images highlight the visual dominance of male narratives and how 'spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, (...) reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood' (Massey 1994, 179).

Figure 7, with its depiction of a children's playpark demarcated as an area of paramilitarised masculine unionist control in Tigers Bay, emphasises the limitation, reduction and recurring public invisibility of women's contribution to the conflict and engagement with its consequences. This becomes emblematic of 'gendered national symbolism' (Ward 2006, 148) that 'works to convey the sorts of roles suitable for men and women to engage in the national project, and in unionist-nationalist discourse there is a lack of positive female imagery'. This is counter to the reality that:

'Throughout the Troubles, both unionist and nationalist women engaged in a range of conflict-related activities, including paramilitary involvement, street protests and sectarianism towards members of the 'other' community (...). Indeed (...) the strength of communal identifications/ differences has been a key impediment to the development of a unified women's movement in NI' (Ashe 2011, 2014).

Since the publication of the photobook, paramilitary flags are no longer flown around the playpark, or around Tigers Bay in general. A participant reflected on how, 'we (had) paramilitary flags at either end (of the playpark) now there's no UDA flags.' Another participant confirmed that, 'somebody somewhere looked at (the photobook) and said, "Right ok, this is a place where kids is going to be. (...)". The community sort of took a bit of a stand there.' The transformation of the area has been such that one participant stated, 'if you were to drive around Tigers Bay now, you'd be lucky if you even see a paramilitary flag.' Another stated, 'when the community takes a hold of something like that (...) they -re-claim (it)'. Whilst this does not suggest that this alone has had an impact on paramilitarism in this region of the city as this remains an ongoing and significant issue (Hourigan et al., 2017), it does, however, suggest that when women's perspectives are made more visible, they begin to challenge the dominance of male narratives of the conflict that permeate the visual iconography and spatial ownership of their localities.

## Conclusion

This visualisation could be viewed as re-imaging, re-establishing and perhaps consolidating the narrative of the contested city, or as O'Dowd and Komarova (2013, 528) suggest, could be said to embody an 'exemplar' approach (that) risks obscuring the dimensions of urban life that Belfast shares with (...) cities not divided on ethno-national grounds'; however, this issue-based approach neither denies nor ignores ongoing ethno-national segregation and division, but instead, acknowledges and highlights it. It demonstrates and uncovers the complexities and contradictions of a society that is emerging from conflict, yet the everyday lived experience of women living in interface areas remains one that is dominated by segregation, surveillance and distinct areas of politicised and gendered space.

Whilst this project highlights the risks of ongoing socio-economic exclusion, its collaborative, participatory methodology demonstrates a model of cross-community activism led by women. The group's intention to use the photobook as an additional tool in lobbying local political representatives 'encourage(s) new forms of grassroots place-making' (O'Dowd and Komarova 2013, 256) that moves beyond the physical demarcations of politicised space. A participant confirmed that, 'every politician in North Belfast got that book' including Northern Ireland's First Minister Arlene Foster. The participant stated, 'I gave it to her; and I put "trust women" on the front of it. I was meaning (...) (that she should) trust the women that (made) this book.' This reinforces that whilst 'Northern Irish women have been consistently underrepresented within the political sphere (...) women from both traditions (are) active in the informal arenas of voluntary activism, peacebuilding and cross- community engagement' (Stapleton and Wilson 2014, 2074). Such methods of community- led cooperative engagement generate what Gizeli (2011, 524) terms a form of 'social capital' whereby 'resources embedded in social structures (...) can be mobilised towards a purposive collective action'. As one participant stated, 'I think (...) that the book actually said, "this is what people are saying. (...) This is something that has been published. These are voices that we haven't heard before because they're not round the table and we need to do something about it."' The production of the photobook therefore directly contributed to increasing the women's public access to, and participation in, the wider public sphere and challenged their exclusion from local power structures. In speaking about the marginalisation of women's voices one participant stated '(they) probably thought because we were below (them) and that we didn't have a right to do something like that.' One participant confirmed that this type of active, visible, creative participation challenges the silencing of 'ordinary women who are trying to improve their community who (don't) have their voices heard. I believe that we achieved that as a collective by doing that book because they can't silence that book.'

## References

- Ashe, Fidelma. 2009. 'From paramilitaries to peacemakers: the gender dynamics of community-based restorative justice in Northern Ireland.' *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 11: 298–314. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467–856x.2008.00345.x
- Doyle, Carey, and Ruth McAreavey. 2014. 'Possibilities for change? Diversity in post-conflict Belfast.' *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action* 18(4–5): 466–475. DOI: 10.1080/13604813.2014.939467
- Gizeli, Theodora-Ismene. 2011. 'A Country of their Own. Women and Peacebuilding.' *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 28(5): 522–542. DOI: 10.1177/0738894211418412
- Graham, Brian, and Catherine Nash. 2006. 'A shared future: Territoriality, pluralism and public policy in Northern Ireland.' *Political Geography* 25(3): 253 – 278. DOI: 10.1016/j.polgeo.2005.12.006
- Hackett, Claire and Bill Rolston. 2009. 'The burden of memory: Victims, storytelling and resistance in Northern Ireland.' *Memory Studies* (September) (2): 355–376. DOI: 10.1177/1750698008337560
- Healing Through Remembering. 2005. "'Storytelling" Audit. An Audit of Personal Story, Narrative and Testimony Initiatives Related to the Conflict in and about Northern Ireland.' Belfast: Healing Through Remembering. Available: [http://web-previews.com/healingthroughremembering/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Storytelling-Audit\\_2005.pdf](http://web-previews.com/healingthroughremembering/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Storytelling-Audit_2005.pdf)
- Lundy, Patricia, and Mark McGovern. 2006. 'Participation, truth and partiality: participatory action research, community-based truth-telling and post-conflict transition in Northern Ireland.' *Sociology* 40(1): 71–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038506058431>
- Mairs Dyer, Jolene. 2013. *Audiovisual storytelling in post-conflict Northern Ireland – participant and audience responses to filming, editing and exhibiting memories of the Troubles via two practice-led collaborative documentary film productions*. PhD Thesis. Ulster University.
- Mairs, Jolene. 2013. 'Unseen Women: Stories from Armagh Gaol. Collaborative post-conflict documentary.' *Journal of Media Practice: Screenworks* 4: 5. Available: <http://screenworks.org.uk/archive/volume-4/unseen-women>

## References

- Mairs Dyer, Jolene. 2014. 'Unseen Women: Stories from Armagh Gaol: Exhibiting contrasting memories of a Contested Space.' In *Challenging History in the Museum. International Perspectives*, edited by Jenny Kidd, Sam Cairns, Alex Drago, Amy Ryall, and Amanda Stearn, 163–174. Ashgate: Surrey, UK.
- Mairs Dyer, Jolene. 2017. 'Women's Political Visualisation of Post-Conflict Belfast.' In *Communication, Culture and Making Meaning in the City: Ethnographic Engagements in Urban Environments*, edited by Ahmet Atay and Jay Brower, 3–24. Maryland, USA: Lexington Books.
- Mairs Dyer, Jolene, Eileen Weir, Margaret Valente and Catrina Campbell. 2015. *Women's Vision from Across the Barricades. A Visual Representation of the Tigers Bay and New Lodge Areas of North Belfast by Women Who Live There*. Coleraine, UK: Ulster University.
- Mairs, Jolene, and Cahal McLaughlin. 2012. 'Unheard Voices: Recording Stories from the Troubles.' In *Documentary in a Changing State: Ireland Since the 1990s*, edited by Carol MacKeogh and Diog O'Connell, 29–41. Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press.
- Massey, Doreen. 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- McLaughlin, Cahal. 2010. *Recording Memories from Political Violence*. Bristol: Intellect.
- McLaughlin, Greg and Stephen Baker. 2010. *The Propaganda of Peace. The Role of Media and Culture in the Northern Ireland Peace Process*. Bristol, UK: Intellect.
- Mitchell, Audra and Liam Kelly. 2011. 'Peaceful spaces? "walking" through the new liminal spaces of peacebuilding and development in North Belfast.' *alternatives: global, local, political*, 36(4): 307–325. doi: 10.1177/0304375411431761
- Morrissey, Mike, Marie Smyth, and Therese Fay. 1999. *The Costs of the Troubles Study. Report on the Northern Ireland Survey: the experience and impact of the Troubles*. Derry/ Londonderry: INCORE. Available: <http://conflictresearch.org.uk/reports/legacy-of-the-conflict/COST-OF-THE-TROUBLES-STUDY.pdf>
- Murtagh, Brendan, and Karen Keaveney. 2006. 'Policy and conflict transformation in the ethnocratic city.' *Space and Polity* 10(2): 187–202. DOI: 10.1080/13562570600921683
- Hourigan, Niamh, John F. Morrison, James Windle, and Andrew Silke. 2018. 'Crime in Ireland north and south: Feuding gangs and profiteering paramilitaries.' *Trends in Organised Crime*, 21(2): 126–146. DOI 10.1007/s12117-017-9312-9

## References

- NISRA (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency). 2017. *Interactive Content*. Retrieved 9 June 2020 from: <http://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/InteractiveMapTheme.aspx?themeNumber=137&themeName=Deprivation>
- O'Dowd, Liam and Milena Komarova. 2013. 'Three narratives in search of a city.' *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 17(4): 526–546. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2013.812366>
- Rallings, Mary-Kathryn. 2014. "'Shared space" as symbolic capital: Belfast and the "right to the city?"' *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*, 18 (4–5): 432–439. DOI: 10.1080/13604813.2014.939481
- Stapleton, K. and J Wilson. 2014. Conflicting categories? Women, conflict and identity in Northern Ireland. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 37(11), 2071–2091. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2013.800570.
- Ward, Margaret. 2013. 'Excluded and silenced: Women in Northern Ireland after the peace process.' *50.50 Inclusive Democracy*. Retrieved 9 June 2020 from: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/margaret-ward/excluded-and-silenced-women-in-northern-ireland-after-peace-process>.
- Ward, Rachel. 2006. *Women Unionism and Loyalism in Northern Ireland. From 'Tea-Makers' to Political Actors*. Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press.



# ADDRESSING THE LEGACY OF INTER-COMMUNAL VIOLENCE THROUGH DRAMA: MAINSTREAM THEATRE AND COMMUNITY ACTION

Kevin De Ornellas & Dónall Mac Cathmhaoill



# ADDRESSING THE LEGACY OF INTER-COMMUNAL VIOLENCE THROUGH DRAMA: MAINSTREAM THEATRE AND COMMUNITY ACTION

## Abstract

Professional theatre writing that explores the conflict has a long history in Ireland, from O'Casey to Mitchell by way of Thompson, Reid, Jones and Lynch. Many plays have radically reframed the public debate about conflict-related issues, challenging the certainties of community and identity. The binaries of the conflict have also been challenged through community and applied drama projects. The authors show that single-authored professional theatre continues to provide a critical mediation on our recent history; and that while they engage conflict issues ideologically, multi-authored and co-created applied theatre works challenge the issues structurally.

Notable applied theatre projects, such as the Derry Playhouse *Theatre of Witness* project, the work of writer/director John McCann at Tinderbox Theatre Company and the Derry Frontline projects have created innovative theatre productions with ordinary people that deal directly with the conflict. Theatre of Witness practitioners worked with those directly affected by conflict violence; the process involved participants working from personal testimony themed around specific events, creating a piece that was performed in the Playhouse. Tinderbox Theatre Company developed many community projects, such as *Turning the Page*, which were co-authored by those involved – participants from working-class Loyalist and Republican communities in Belfast who then performed the work. And at Derry Frontline extensive development workshops produced a core narrative and characters for a play that was then scripted by the company director, Dan Baron Cohen.

Ultimately we both celebrate the role of drama in promoting dialogue between one-time opposed communities and describe a fluid, changing and ongoing tradition of dialogue through drama.

KEYWORDS: *drama, theatre, writing, cross-community, collaboration*

## The practice of applied theatre for conflict resolution

Irish theatre, from both north and south, has always tackled questions of identity and community. From Dion Boucicault, through Sean O'Casey and Sam Thompson to

the works of Martin Lynch, Marie Jones and Gary Mitchell, the plays of every historical period have concerned themselves with the major issues of our history. Ireland, being Ireland, these plays have inevitably involved inter-community violence. Through the seventies and eighties, as the conflict transformed communities in Northern Ireland, community theatre emerged as a means for ordinary people to mediate the critical issues affecting them. There is general agreement that these projects, though inevitably non-uniform, are defined by their focus on generating social change (Kershaw 1992; Taylor 2003; Nicholson 2005; Prentki and Preston 2009; Mackey 2016; Nicholson and Hughes 2016). Thus it can be argued that while the professional productions of the period engage conflict issues ideologically, applied theatre challenges the issues structurally. Inevitably, the conflict occupied a central thematic position and resulted in a uniquely inflected praxis. It is crucial to stress that community theatre in Northern Ireland morphed into something different to other regions. Definitions applicable to British community theatre are not adequate to account for developments in Ulster. For example, Owen Kelly describes the growth of community arts in Britain as a connection made between radical political movements and professional artists:

‘Firstly there was the passionate interest in creating new and liberatory forms of expression... Secondly there was the movement by groups of fine artists out of the galleries and into the streets. Thirdly there was the emergence of a new kind of political activist who believes that creativity was an essential tool in any kind of radical struggle’ (Kelly 1984, 11).

However the community sector in Northern Ireland was different in nature and the social and political context refracted the usual processes and results into something of a unique corpus.

### **The history. Theatre as reconciliation: The Jellicoe model**

Community and applied theatre in Northern Ireland has always centred on the encounter. From early cross-community projects (Grant 1993) to the Theatre of Witness (Pfeiffer and Weiglhofer, 2020) the work has focused on presence and engagement with the other. Participants in these projects describe the transformative power of this encounter, from mutual fearfulness to acceptance, and ultimately friendship (ibid, 178).

A major turning point was Martin Lynch’s discovery of the Colway Trust projects (Jellicoe 1987). Lynch himself identifies the moment of inspiration:

‘I read a lot of Ann Jellicoe and I saw that she was hiring a professional writer and a professional director to work with community groups and I thought, “ah right, right... that must be what we do”’ (Interview with the researchers 2019).

Lynch’s discovery of Ann Jellicoe can be fairly described as a watershed, both for Lynch

and for the sector in Northern Ireland as a whole. Based on his readings of Jellicoe, Lynch adopted and adapted her model for use with communities in Northern Ireland, first on *The Stone Chair*, a play developed with the community in the Short Strand in East Belfast and, subsequently, with Dock Ward Community Drama Project, Ballybeen Community Theatre and other projects – as a writer, facilitator and mentor, both on his own account, and, from 1993, as co-founder and first chair of the Community Arts Forum. Arguably, the pinnacle of this type of work was *The Wedding Community Play* in 1998, where all of the above-mentioned community theatre companies collaborated on a large-scale production that won plaudits, critical acclaim and the attention of funders and, importantly, policymakers.

### **Cross-community theatre**

The ensuing period saw a rapid expansion of cross-community theatre projects – usefully described by David Grant in *Playing the Wild Card* (1993). As the unfolding policy of the UK governments of the eighties and nineties saw ‘normalisation’ as the key to resolving the Ulster conflict, funds were set aside for the promotion of community understanding; funding bodies included the Community Relations Council, the CCRU at Stormont, local council good relations funds, and Cultural Traditions funding through ACNI. This funding provided support for organisations working specifically within the community development field, such as Protestant and Catholic Encounter (PACE) and Northern Ireland Children’s Holiday Scheme (N.I.C.H.S.) (Grant 1993). Significantly though, the funds were also valuable revenue streams for the professional theatre sector; leading companies such as Big Telly, Replay and Tinderbox used these funds to commission professional writers to create plays on themes related to the conflict.

Much of this work occupied the space left by the community theatre sector: while organisations such as PACE, N.I. C. H. S. and Neighbourhood Open Workshops worked on cross-community themes, and community theatre groups focused on single identity projects that advocated for individual communities (such as The People’s Theatre in Ballymurphy, Dock Ward Community Drama Project in north Belfast, Ballybeen Community Theatre in East Belfast, and others). Derry Frontline projects (1988–1994) straddled the two forms, working with a largely nationalist/republican community, but developing plays, under the directorship of Dan Baron Cohen, that espoused non-sectarian values. The professional companies, by offering plays written by Stewart Parker, Maris Jones, Martin Lynch, Gary Mitchell, Robin Glendenning, Owen McCafferty and others were able to challenge what could be perceived as the certainties of work developed on behalf of individual, partisan communities.

### **Post-1998**

Undoubtedly the most significant development in the theatre for reconciliation followed from the most important historical moment of the period: the signing of The

Belfast Agreement (popularly known as the Good Friday Agreement) in 1998, and the referenda that produced the current settlement. This was facilitated by the New Labour administration elected the year before, with a broad agenda of social inclusiveness that was supportive of the Arts, and that prioritised the use of Arts to develop communities (See Hamayon-Alfaro 2011; Floyd O'Donnell et al. 2012). Martin Lynch describes it as a dream come true for the sector:

'Tony Blair, and the Department of Culture in London and Belfast, started sending these dictats to the Arts Council that was the same as what we wanted. Ah, it was just fantastic.' (Lynch, quoted in Floyd, O'Donnell et al. 2012.)

The social changes wrought by the settlement led to a diversification in the theatres that were developed, driven by a changed set of circumstances and the new themes that emerged. The growth in new communities from other parts of the world (see Shirlow 2014) resulted in new types of work that examined the migrant experience.

John McCann, as well as being a noted playwright, was Outreach Director of Tinderbox Theatre Company (2000–2008) and developed a number of projects with these 'new' communities, including *Chaat Masala* with the Indian community (2006), *On Goy Lok Yip*, with the Chinese Welfare Association (2007), and *In the Land of Green Pasture*, with NI Community For Refugees And Asylum Seekers (2007). Kabosh Theatre Company also commissioned work by a leading playwright, Rosemary Jenkinson. In 2016 her *Lives in Translation* dealt with the experience of migrant women. Sole Purpose in Derry has delivered a number of community projects with migrant communities, particularly Syrian refugees, and had a particular success with *Did You Come By Boat?* in 2010, written by Elly Omondi Odhiambo and Patricia Byrne. Perhaps the most active professional company in this area has been Terra Nova Productions, founded in 2007 by Canadian director Andrea Montgomery: all of the work delivered by this company is self-consciously cross-cultural. These have included large-scale Shakespeare productions, such as *The Belfast Tempest* (2016) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2019) as well as many pieces of new writing. Montgomery is herself a playwright of considerable substance and is renowned enough to have won the Nick Darke Award.

### Theatre of witness

While work with migrant communities provided a new strand for the professional theatre sector, the legacy of the conflict still preoccupied theatre makers, and the many unresolved issues fed the key themes for much of the work. While traditional forms continued to draw audiences, new forms began to emerge. For example, in 2009 Teya Sepinuck, a director from Philadelphia, initiated a project at the Derry Playhouse using her own process, Theatre of Witness, which uses the 'process of telling life stories' to create theatre (Pfeiffer and Weighofer 2020). Over a period of five years and

several projects, she worked with those directly affected by conflict violence: former combatants, security and police personnel, those who had been victims of the conflict and those who had lost loved ones. Working from personal testimony themed around specific events Sepinuck would craft a performance text. This would then be performed by the participants (see Sepinuck 2013; Grant and Jennings 2013). The plays were initially performed in Derry Playhouse and subsequently toured to Belfast and beyond. The demonstrable productiveness of the process proved influential: other directors and facilitators worked on parallel projects using the Theatre of Witness techniques. The process was not without its critics, however. Carole-Anne Upton challenged Sepinuck's insistence on the truthfulness of the work:

'The very claim to authenticity on the basis of non-performer status in the theatre is paradoxical if not outright disingenuous. Performance is constitutive of the reality of the performer. By virtue of repeating a rehearsed series of actions onstage before different audiences, real people become real actors (Upton 2011, 213).'

More explicitly, playwright Tim Loane memorably, if caustically and vituperatively, called it 'Troubles porn' (quoted in Jennings and Grant 2011, 74). At the heart of both criticisms lies anxiety about the use and possible exploitation of ordinary people, non-professionals, giving accounts of traumatic experiences they have suffered. More generally, the possibility of such memory work resulting in re-traumatisation has been raised (Butterwick and Selman 2012; Miller 2018).

This legacy of work, despite these various controversies, did establish the Playhouse as a centre of theatre for reconciliation, and proved the viability of theatre as a medium for negotiating the legacy issues of the conflict, and in this it can be said to have enabled the development of new types of theatre as well as contributing to a realised peace. The second half of this essay examines a more recent production, *The Crack In Everything* (2018), written and directed by Jo Egan, also at Derry Playhouse, which pushed the possibilities of professional theatre as a means of mediating the legacy of conflict and moving forward.

### **The plays of Jo Egan**

As a writer, director and facilitator, Jo Egan has originated some of the most lauded and noted applied theatre projects in Northern Ireland, while combining this with a career as a professional playwright. In 1999 she conceived the seminal *Wedding Community Play*, which was written by Martin Lynch and Marie Jones, about a mixed marriage (Moriarty 2004). The play was, up to that point, the most ambitious community theatre project undertaken with groups from Short Strand in East Belfast, Ballybeen, Dock Ward, Ardoyne's Tongue in Cheek, the Shankill, Real World Disability Drama and Lettuce Hill from the Lower Falls all collaborating on the script ideas and working together on shaping the production. Significantly, the play was site specific:



audiences were bussed from the neutral city centre hub of the Community Arts Forum headquarters to the locations that served as sets. These included the Rosemary Street Presbyterian Church for the wedding, a riverside bar for the reception venue, and actual houses in Belfast's Madrid Street and Templemore Avenue as the family homes (Cleveland 2008). Coming right in the midst of the emerging peace process, and only a short time after the Good Friday Agreement, it offered playgoers an opportunity to go into areas and homes in parts of Belfast that were only very recently inaccessible to those from one community or the other.

This combination of dramaturgical innovation, community engagement, inclusive process and professional production ethos served as a hallmark of Egan's working method over the next two decades. Among the projects she developed thereafter, perhaps the most critically acclaimed was *Crimea Square*, which won the Audience Award at the Belfast Festival at Queen's in 2013. Emerging out of writing workshops facilitated by Egan, a group of writers from the Shankill area of Belfast created a play from the history of the area, using dramatic forms to advocate for their community. Alison Jeffers (2016) has described this as a project unique in its nature: an exchange of the expertise of the theatre professional for the expertise of the local writer, where authorship and authority became vested in the community. In this sense the project was a perfect encapsulation of the notions of 'barter' that are fundamental to the theatre anthropology of Eugenio Barba. Simultaneously, Egan's professional writing has been consistent with these values, using real experiences to elucidate and advocate on critical social issues – always with the determined aim of generating change.

Egan's play, *The Ritual of Life* (2011), was created with oral testimony of nine working-class Protestant women from in and around Belfast, and intersected their accounts of their own - and their mothers' and grandmothers' - experiences to construct the text. Her 2014 play, *Sweeties*, was written from survivors' experiences of child sexual abuse and was based on interviews with four women, purposely to interrogate the question of memory and the oppressions that come as a result of suppressing trauma. (The play may be seen as a useful counterpoint to the comparatively mainstream and arguably masculinist Arnold Wesker false memory syndrome play, *Denial*, from 1997 – a play which notoriously conveys scepticism about the efficacy of encouraging alleged victims of child abuse to recall or even invent experiences from their distant past). For *Madame Geneva*, which Egan produced through her own company Macha Productions, in 2017, she used historical records to address crises of poverty, prostitution and alcoholism in the eighteenth century, and the patriarchal strategies used by the men who governed the society to regulate alcohol use, prostitution and women's bodies, resulting in the creation of the first Magdalene Laundries and homes for 'fallen women'. Egan is also a teacher, running courses in playwriting and memory writing at the Crescent Arts Centre in Belfast. Through all these productions one can see a set of unifying preoccupations explored through a consistent praxis: using real accounts and memories to probe the past, with a view to effecting change in the present.

In interviews, Egan regularly references the work of psychologist Siobhan O'Neill who describes trauma as related to the function of memory. Egan describes interviewing O'Neill for *The Crack in Everything*:

'She's the major academic looking at the impact of trauma, how we need to integrate how we approach dealing with trauma into all our structures, everything, if Northern Ireland is ever to have a meaningful journey from The Troubles and we don't want to embed the trauma for generations. So, she told me an extraordinary thing. She told me that trauma and post-traumatic stress is a fault with memory.' (Personal interview, April 2020).

This concept of the corrupting and healing power of memory is the central idea in the play *The Crack in Everything*: it is her most thorough realisation of her practice as both a professional playwright and as an artist who uses theatre for reconciliation and healing. Developed as part of the Theatre and Peacebuilding Academy programme at Derry Playhouse, the play uses the accounts of six families whose children were killed during the Troubles. The project had its genesis in 2017 with an application by the North West Play Resource Centre, the parent company of Derry Playhouse, to the Peace IV Programme of the EU. The Special European Programmes body (SEUPB) approved funding for the Playhouse and its project partners of €859,069.50 to develop a three-year programme of projects designed to use theatre and arts for promoting conflict transformation and awarded a substantial grant for the purpose. Egan was the first playwright commissioned to deliver a project. This was initiated in March 2018.

While the Playhouse had garnered a well-deserved reputation for work that addressed legacy issues of the conflict through its programme of Theatre of Witness plays, Egan saw her work as significantly different, being a mediation by the theatre maker on the experiences of others. Where Theatre of Witness operated by asking participants to tell their stories, listen to each other's stories and develop the ideas for the play communally, ultimately it remained a participant-focused process: those who took part in workshops also performed their stories on stage. The power of the form lay in the audience being in the presence of a person whose lived experiences formed the performance text, and thus witnessing a kind of sharing of personal truths. Egan's process was interview-based. Over a period of months she recorded over thirty hours of material with members of the families of Henry Cunningham, Damien Harkin, Julie Livingstone, Kathryn Eakin, Annette McGavigan and Kathleen Feeney – the six children whose deaths were the subject of the play. Egan herself then shaped the performance text from these accounts. The cast was not comprised of those whose testimony was collected, but was a mix of professional actors, those connected with the families and others whose experiences had been similar (personal interview, April 2020). In this sense, *The Crack in Everything* differs from the Theatre of Witness projects. It was an authored professional production, with Egan as playwright. She also directed the shows, in November and December 2018, at the Playhouse in Derry, and the Brian Friel Theatre in Belfast.

## The ideas

The notion of the artist as activist whose area of expertise is the imaginative realm draws on Jean Paul Lederach and his concept of the 'moral imagination'. This comprises four different, but linked, frames that create the conditions to facilitate profound social change:

'Stated simply, the moral imagination requires the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies; the ability to sustain a paradoxical curiosity that embraces complexity without reliance on dualistic polarity; the fundamental belief in and pursuit of the creative act; and the acceptance of the inherent risk of stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the far too familiar landscape of violence' (Lederach 2005, 5).

Egan, in her accounts of her work, highlights the significance of both taking risks and the usefulness of 'mess'. She argues that the writer/theatre maker is adept at making sense of the mess, of applying the imagination to things that seem without any coherent structure and using artistic forms to offer a moral order in place of violent disorder. In her reading of Lederach, his ideas are a development of W. B. Yeats' 'artistic imagination'. Her tender document for the Theatre and Peacebuilding Academy role that led to the play, *The Crack in Everything*, explicitly draws on this notion of the transformative power of the imagination with its opening quotation:

'The Artistic Imagination is the way a country empowers and liberates itself.' Historian, Roy Foster paraphrasing W. B. Yeats' (Egan: Tender, National/ International Facilitator for The Playhouse 2017).

This process of engaging with the disorder of fractured memory is not without risks. Rolston and Hackett, addressing the thorny matter of memory in relation to victims and survivors of conflict, point out that: 'storytelling is far from simple, uncomplicated and non-contentious' (2009, 372). That said, they make a pressing case for processes that facilitate the mediation of memory in dealing with the legacy of the Northern Irish conflict. This, they say, operates as a means of liberation, provided that the telling of stories is about exercising agency, as well as healing trauma (ibid., 356). For Egan, the act of creating a play from the lived experiences of others involves offering a sense of meaning where none can be perceived - art filling the place that the agonistic mode has held. Victor Turner describes this process of social drama functioning as a means of resolution: 'finding the apt occasion for the performance of a major ritual celebrating the values, common interests, and moral order of the widest recognized cultural and moral community, transcending the divisions of the local group' (1982, 10). It is this act of public address that the work of Jo Egan, and of other artists operating in this area, does so powerfully. She describes this mediation of memory not as an imperative of dramaturgical technique:

'If we wish to change the trauma impact on people, we need to revalue memory, we

need to help people to find a way to revalue memory, and that might be somebody writing a short story or a book or a one-person show... a piece of dance that resonates with them' (Personal interview, April 2020).

Thus the work is a community-serving necessity, a sort of non-denominational version of religious catharsis, a moral and community ritual that transcends the merely aesthetic.

## Conclusion

In the latter years of the conflict, and more particularly as the process of healing and transforming Northern Irish society follow on from the (comparative) peace engineered by politicians, the professional theatre sector has developed in relation to the needs of the society of which it is part. While the conflict was ongoing, theatre offered people an opportunity to advocate for their communities and their rights – and sometimes, to connect with others from other communities – with their own demands for rights. In Lederach's terms, theatre has allowed for the individual to imagine themselves in the place of their enemies. Simultaneously, the professional theatre writer and the professional companies have offered more nuanced, reflective works that aim for a broader view of the conflict, and that propose a commonality of core values that can be shared, irrespective of community.

In the post-conflict period, there has been a perceived need for art, and particularly theatre, to operate as a means of addressing historic wrongs, to witness the past, and to act as a medium for negotiating memories of the conflict. This work is, excitingly, in an unresolved state of evolution, where the connection between the professional writer or director, and the victims of the Troubles offers the possibility of mediating the traumas resulting from 'faults of memory'. Rolston and Hackett make the important point that: 'At the individual level trauma and fear may lead to silence rather than speech, while at the social level there may not be spaces in which stories can be told and listened to sympathetically' (2009, 356). In the absence of other modes of reconciliation, other fora for addressing our experience of conflict, the work of the theatre maker, and of all artists working in conflict transformation assume a particular importance. In Yeats' words: 'We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry' (Yeats 1917). To study this developing poetic/theatrical/community/performative is not just to look back and celebrate the role of drama in promoting dialogue between one-time opposed communities, but to engage with a fluid, changing, dynamic tradition of dialogue through drama that is unique to Ulster and to this particular peace process.

## References

- Butterwick, Shauna and Selman, 2012. 'Embodied knowledge and decolonization: Walking with theater's powerful and risky pedagogy'. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 134: 61–69.
- Cleveland, William. 2008. *Art and upheaval: artists on the world's frontlines*. NY: New Village Press.
- Egan, Jo. 2017. *Tender, National/International Facilitator for The Playhouse*. Derry: North West Play Resource.
- Floyd, Heather, O'Donnell, Caragh, O'Reilly, Ryan, Cochrane, Lucy and Shields, Conor. 2012. *A Coming of Age: The Shared Legacy of Community Arts Forum and New Belfast Community Arts Initiative*. Belfast: Community Arts Partnership.
- Grant, David (1993) *Playing the Wild Card*. Belfast: Community Relations Council.
- Grant, David and Jennings, Matt (2013) *Processing the Peace: An Interview with Teya Sepinuck*. *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 23(3): 314–322.
- Hamayon-Alfaro, Hélène. 2011. 'Sustaining Social Inclusion through the Arts: The Case of Northern Ireland'. *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 37 (1/2): 120–137.
- Jeffers, Alison. 2016. 'Authority, Authorisation and Authorship: Participation in Community Plays in Belfast'. In *Performance and participation: practices, audiences, politics*, edited by A. Harpin, and H. Nicholson, 209–229. London: Palgrave Macmillan,.
- Jellicoe, Ann. 1987. *Community plays: how to put them on*. London: Methuen.
- Kelly, Owen. 1984. *Community, art and the state: storming the citadels*. London: Comedia.
- Lederach, John Paul. 2005. *The moral imagination: the art and soul of building peace*. Oxford University Press.
- Miller, Jennifer B. 2018. 'The transformative and healing power of Theatre of Witness'. *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 30(2): 47–56.
- Montague, Richard, and Peter Shirlow. 2014. *Challenging racism: ending hate*. Belfast: Centre for Democracy and Peace Building.
- Moriarty, Gerri. 2004. The wedding community play project: a cross-community production in Northern Ireland. In *Theatre and Empowerment: community drama on the world stage*, edited by R. Boon and J. Plastow, 13–32. Cambridge University Press.

## References

- Pfeiffer, Kerstin and Magdalena Weiglhofer. 2020. Negotiating contested heritages through theatre and storytelling. *Heritage and Festivals in Europe: performing identities*, edited by U. Kockel, et al., 173–187. Abingdon: Routledge,.
- Rolston, Bill. and Claire Hackett. 2009. 'The Burden of Memory: Victims, Survivors, Story-telling and Resistance in the North of Ireland'. *Memory Studies*, 2: 355–376.
- Sepinuck, Teya. 2013. *Theatre of Witness: finding the medicine in stories of suffering, transformation, and peace*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Turner, Victor. 1982. *From ritual to theatre: the human seriousness of play*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications.
- Upton, Carole-Anne. 2011. 'Real people as actors— actors as real people'. *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31(2): 209–222.
- Yeats, William Butler. 1990. 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae'. In *A vision and related writings* edited by A Norman Jeffares. London: Arena.

## Interviews

- Jo Egan, Interview with the researchers, April 2020. Martin Lynch, Interview with the researchers, February 2019.



# WOMEN IN PEACE MEDIATION ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND: TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE DEFINITION

Heidi Riley & Emma Murphy



# WOMEN IN PEACE MEDIATION ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND: TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE DEFINITION

## Abstract

This paper argues that narrow understandings of 'peace mediation' that tend to orientate around formal peace negotiations play a role in perpetuating a lack of recognition of the extensive and crucial role that grassroots women play in peace mediation.

Global statistics on women's inclusion in high-level peace talks demonstrate high levels of gender inequality. A 2016 study shows that between 1992 and 2011 women only made up 2 percent of mediators, 4 percent of signatories and 9 percent of negotiators. However, at the grassroots level, women tend to play vital, yet often unrecognised, roles in peacebuilding, which also utilises meditative practice. In the Irish context, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition played a crucial role in the negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement and are included in global statistics on women in mediation. Yet those at the grassroots level, who negotiated between, and continue to negotiate between, contentious groups are rarely recognised as mediators.

This paper begins with a review of the theoretical literature on women in peacebuilding and mediation, including critiques of the narrow definitions of these fields employed in official documentation and policy. The second part examines empirical evidence from the voices of a diversity of women working in peace mediation from the island of Ireland. Findings show that women working in this area engage in meditative practice in their everyday peacebuilding work, but do not tend to define their work in terms of peace mediation. The paper therefore argues that the way that peace mediation is currently defined and what types of mediation are valued perpetuates the lack of both institutional and self-recognition of women's work in the field of peace mediation.

**KEYWORDS:** *Peace and conflict, gender, mediation, negotiations, UNSCR 1325*

## Introduction

Twenty years on from the adoption of United National Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security, there still remains a major shortfall in women's participation in peace mediation. Global statistics on women's inclusion in high-level peace talks demonstrate that between 1992 and 2018, women have only made up 3 percent of mediators and 13 percent of negotiators (Bell et al. 2019). While there have been some significant improvements in selected high-profile peace negotiations, such

as the recent peace negotiations in Colombia, women's participation has tended to have its roots in advocacy for inclusion rather than through natural selection. However, while these figures are particularly worrying, they tend to refer to high-level peace talks, or 'Track 1' negotiations, as they are normally known. Yet what these figures overlook is the fact that at the grassroots level, women play vital, yet often unrecognised, roles in peacebuilding, which also utilises 'meditative practice'. This, we take to refer to the negotiatory and diplomacy skills required to mediate between contentious groups or individuals.

This paper argues that narrow definitions of peace mediation and its general association with Track 1 negotiations contribute to overshadowing the realities of women's diverse and extensive experience in mediation practice, much of which is located at the grassroots level. This pattern, we argue, actually perpetuates gender inequality at Track 1 level by assuming women lack qualifications in this field. As a qualitative analysis, the paper takes its empirical findings from the voices of women peacebuilders from across the island of Ireland, who use mediative practice in their peacebuilding work.

### **Gender, peacebuilding and peace negotiations**

Peacebuilding is not just a simple process of shifting from war to peace but involves a multitude of often interlinked processes of negotiations between warring parties: transforming intergroup relations, negotiating new forms of governance, addressing issues around wartime harms and negotiating the rebuilding of a broken economy (Ramsbottom et al.; Hudson 2009). The voices heard and prioritised through these processes have been shown to be inherently gendered (Cohn 2013; de Alwis et al. 2013; Hudson 2016). While there is extensive scholarship that exposes the multitude of roles that women play in conflict, including prominent roles in armed groups (Henshaw 2016; Thomas and Bond 2015), when it comes to negotiating the high-politics of peace in all its forms, essentialist assumptions around women's natural roles and way of being tend to be pushed to the fore, frequently leading to the exclusion or limiting of women's voices. Assumptions around war as a 'man's game' leads to the closing of spaces in negotiations between male political leaders or male leaders of warring parties (Cockburn and Zarkov 2002). This restricted understanding of what peace negotiations are overlooks the fact that negotiating peace affects the whole of society, not just those who lead militaries or governments. Similarly, in contexts where women have been traditionally excluded from politics, a common argument is that women do not have the experience to participate (de Alwis et al. 2013).

Essentialist assumptions tend to associate women in conflict with 'victimhood' and the 'community' and men with the hard politics of war (Charlesworth 2008; Cohn 2013). Assumption around women's inherent 'peaceful' nature therefore leads to a normally 'uncritical' acknowledgement of women's involvement at the community level, but

at the same time tends to de-professionalise community-level peacebuilding as 'just something that women do'. This is contrasted with the value placed on participation in what is traditionally viewed as the masculine realm of high politics.

Although UNSCR 1325 has provided a platform for advocacy around increasing women's participation, this inclusion is based on the perspective that women should be included due to their naturally 'peaceful' nature (Shepherd 2016). This essentialising logic has led to an 'add women and stir' approach to women's inclusion in peacebuilding processes, which 'fails to capture the complexities of women's situated political positions in violent societies' and assumes that women are one homogenous group (Ní Aoláin 2016, 158).

Work on women in peace mediation tends to focus either on the challenges that women face in seeking to gain a seat at the negotiating table, or the benefits of women's participation in peace negotiations.<sup>1</sup> (Turner 2019; Hudson 2016; O'Reilly 2013). On the latter point, UN Women (2015) shows that where women are included at the negotiating table, there is a 35 percent greater likelihood of sustaining peace for more than fifteen years; others have demonstrated that where women participate meaningfully in peace processes, there is an increased possibility of reaching an agreement or creating a more inclusive document (Paffenholtz et al. 2016). However, many of these findings are politicised to invoke ideas around women's natural ability to engage in 'soft skills' or women's effectiveness due to their closeness to the community. Problematically, this further essentialises or instrumentalises women's inclusion, rather than normalising the fact that women are qualified to be there.

One of the problems with this literature is that it tends to take its starting point from a definition of 'mediation' that refers to high-level peace negotiations. This starting point is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, it overlooks the value of Track 2 and 3 mediation processes. These are negotiations that take place at the mid-level such as between business or religious figures (Track 2) or the community level (Track 3). Such processes are vital for the healing of the community and for the success of the agreement (Ramsbottom et al. 2011). However, while grassroots initiatives are vital in bringing people and groups together to address conflict, they are seen as an 'unofficial process,' occurring remotely from Track 1 processes, and thus are less respected (Turner 2018). Contrary to Track 1 negotiations, women's representation is much higher at the Track 3 level but given its 'unofficial status,' it is often overlooked or unpaid. This perpetuates the perception of women's lack of professionalisation in mediation work or the false notion that there is a lack of qualified women.

---

1. Selection criteria are often skewed towards excluding women due to assumptions around a lack of qualifications. Domestic pressures such as childcare, gender expectations in the home, or societal gender norms that perpetuate the risks that women face when they put their head above the parapet also impedes women's participation (Turner 2019; Hudson 2016).

## Mediation and mediative practice

In its 'Guidance for Effective Mediation,' the United Nations defines mediation as 'a process whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements' (United Nations 2012). However, when we use this definition it tends to refer to specific warring parties rather than the contentious groups at the grassroots level, as this is normally incorporated into practices of peacebuilding, despite using the same 'mediative practice'. While Bagshaw (2009, 18) notes that mediation and peacebuilding are linked, as they 'empower people to be active participants in transforming conflict and making decisions that affect their lives,' what is more important to point out is that the practices used in Track 1 and Track 3 negotiations are largely the same. Thus, by broadening the definition of mediator to include those that use mediative practice across all levels of peace negotiations this reveals, firstly, that women are much more heavily represented at Track 3 than at Track 1 but secondly, and more importantly, that there is a much greater number of women who are skilled in mediative practice than is portrayed in current statistics.

Some scholarship on women's inclusion in peace processes has gone beyond the mediation dimension of the process and sought to highlight women's inclusion in peace processes in terms of other forms of action, such as, observers, mass action or advocacy (Paffenholz et al. 2016). However, while this does provide a more comprehensive picture of women's contribution and agency within peace processes, recognising the myriad ways in which women engage, it is too broad a definition to gain a more meaningful picture of women's experiences of mediation. Instead, if we look at mediation in terms of the use of 'mediative practice,' then we get a more accurate picture of the realities of women's experience in mediation practice that also takes into account what is normally termed as peacebuilding.

## Women and mediative practice on the island of Ireland

The Northern Ireland Women's Coalition played a crucial role in the negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement. While key figures from the Coalition are recognised internationally for their work, although sometimes insufficiently, there are other women who participated in, and continue to use mediative practice in extensive and diverse grassroots peacebuilding, but who remain overlooked professionally. Similarly, there are numerous women across the island of Ireland who work internationally in peacebuilding and mediation practice as well as those from newer communities who are now living on the island of Ireland. In order to explore how mediative practice is used in peacebuilding practice on the island of Ireland and gain a more accurate picture of women who are skilled in this area, four focus groups were carried out with a diversity of women across the island of Ireland.<sup>2</sup> This included women from both

---

2. Focus groups were held in: Belfast, Derry/Londonderry, Dundalk and Dublin, between September and December 2019.

Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and those who work both domestically and internationally. Also included in the focus groups were migrant women, some of whom have come to Ireland as refugees and have vital experience in mediative practice from their country of origin. Findings show that if we take a broader understanding of what we mean by mediation to take into account women peacebuilders that use mediative practice, this paints a very different picture to the one that only examines high-level negotiations. What is also shown is that the narrow definition of 'mediator' in the formal sense of the term not only perpetuates a lack of external recognition but also contributes to women peacebuilders questioning their own identity as peace mediators (Riley and Murphy 2020).<sup>3</sup> This, in turn, is part of the problem in fully recognising the diversity and level of experience of women working in mediation across the island of Ireland.

### **Diversity of experience**

Within the Northern Irish context, participants exhibited a wide range of expertise. Some participants had worked directly in prisons during and after the Troubles; others worked on arts projects designed to bring different communities together in a shared space. One woman began her mediation journey as a child, when she accompanied her mother to peacebuilding meetings and strategy sessions. These women have been involved in every facet and stage of peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. However, while the immediate connotation of peacebuilding and mediation across the island might be mediative practice related to the Troubles, the expertise held by participants was not limited to a single context. Many women had also worked in peacebuilding and mediation internationally and the focus groups also included women from newer communities who spoke of using mediative practice in peacebuilding in a diverse range of countries such as Burundi, Guatemala, Pakistan, Myanmar, Colombia and Tanzania and Somalia. The diversity of backgrounds and experiences also drew attention to new issues within familiar contexts. Several participants touched on the importance of considering intersectional identity concerns within Northern Ireland, for example. One participant worked closely with the Roma and traveller community, while another worked with ethnic minorities in Derry/Londonderry; both noted that peace in Northern Ireland required incorporating the full range of Northern Irish society and that dialogue and mediative practice at the community level is vital in order for peace to be sustainable.

### **Lack of self-recognition as a mediator**

Despite the wealth of knowledge and expertise found across the focus groups, the second key theme emerging from the focus groups was a lack self-recognition as peace mediators. In all four of the focus groups, participants often began their statements

---

3. This research was undertaken as part of the project Irish Consortium on the Promotion of Women in Peace Mediation and Negotiations' funded by the Irish Research Council and the Irish Human Rights Commission.



with disclaimers such as, 'I'm not a mediator, but...' Even when describing work that is clearly located in the field of mediation practice, many women seemed reluctant to label themselves as mediators. Part of this reluctance may stem from a dissonance between job titles or descriptions and the concept of 'mediation': many roles that employ mediation practice, for example, do not fall under the umbrella of formal mediation positions or are perceived more in terms of community dialogue. However, despite a reluctance to define themselves explicitly as mediators, discussions around the meaning of 'mediative practice' increasingly led women to feel more comfortable to describe themselves in these terms. One participant, for example, described an experience of talking to a peer who worked with Orange Order members to help them soften and change their outlooks; when the participant told her peer that this work was a form of mediation and peacebuilding, the woman was initially reluctant to call herself a mediator. After discussing, however, the woman began to recognise her role within the fields of peacebuilding and mediation. Other participants echoed these feelings, stating that while they had initially not thought of themselves as mediators or peacebuilders, through these discussions they had changed their self-perception.

A more prevalent pattern, however, centred on the tendency of participants to downplay their achievements in the mediation and peacebuilding arenas. Many of the participants noted that they often struggled with 'imposter syndrome' or similar difficulties in accepting their own legitimacy as mediators. Some participants shared that while they were aware of their own tendency to discount the work they had done in the field of mediation and peacebuilding, they still had trouble reframing their self-perception. This lack of self-identification as mediators made it difficult for women to pursue careers in the field and thus would prevent them from seeking to 'climb the ladder' into the political mediation.

### **Lack of external recognition**

Part of what lies beneath this problem relates to a third theme of the focus groups: the lack of external recognition for women's mediation work. Some of the common reasons for participants' lack of self-identification as mediators were that they are frequently not paid for their work or that their titles did not include any mention of mediation or mediative practice. While there was an abundance of women engaged in mediative practice on the island, opportunities for advancement to Track 1 positions, for example, were limited or non-existent. Although many participants had no desire to be involved in Track 1 mediation, the frustration associated with finding opportunities for professional development in the field was common to nearly all participants. Some participants noted that part of the issue was being allowed at the table at all; often, participants had heard of forums for mediators, but were not themselves asked to participate. In other cases, even when women were present, they struggled to make their voices heard in an environment dominated by men. For many women, participation itself was a lose-lose situation; they were either seen as too 'soft' to

make an impact or portrayed as domineering and overbearing. In either case, their behaviour was often used as an excuse to make future participation more difficult. The women in the focus groups also noted that their participation was often expected to be administrative or logistical in nature; in some cases, they felt that their inclusion was merely lip service to gender equality norms. One woman with years of mediation expertise described her experience once she was appointed to reconciliation and awareness-raising task forces in Somalia, where her role was often to fetch tea. Truly inclusive involvement and recognition was a rare experience for most participants.

## Analysis

Empirical evidence from the Irish case highlights some of the most problematic aspects of the narrow definition of mediation. Across four focus groups with participants from a wide variety of professional and personal backgrounds, one of the most universal patterns was the difficulty women had in identifying as mediators. This pattern has clear connections to the way in which mediation is defined: when women are conditioned to believe that the only 'real' or 'serious' mediation is Track 1 mediation, they become uncomfortable identifying their own work as mediative practice. In turn, because this work often does not fall under the official umbrella of mediation, women's work at the grassroots level is constructed as separate from the realm of career development. The constant undermining of their experience by male colleagues, moreover, reinforces the misconception that the work these women do is something of a hobby rather than invaluable professional experience. Essentialised understandings of women's location in the community or that they are 'by nature' more peaceful leads to the perpetuation of ideas that this is just something women do. These processes are thus not seen in professional terms and as a result, women are often unpaid, overworked and unrecognised for their 'professional' skills.

The lack of self-identification as mediators couples with the deficiency of institutional recognition of women's mediative practice to create a vicious cycle, in which public officials and organisations decry the shortage of women in mediation while reinforcing barriers to their entry into the field. The focus groups also illustrated the additional difficulties facing migrant women: the broad lack of recognition of grassroots work often translates to a near erasure of years (or even decades) of work undertaken in a different global context. Part of the difficulty for migrant women comes from the struggle to locate outlets in which to keep utilising their experience with mediative practice. Narratives from the focus groups indicate that in any case, for both domestic and migrant women, opportunities for working in mediation are limited by narrow conceptualisations of what constitutes mediation.

## Conclusion

This short paper has shown how the narrow definition of 'mediator' associated with Track 1 diplomacy has implications for the recognition of the realities of women's roles in mediative practice across all tracks of negotiations. This is evidenced through the Irish context, which shows that, although when pressed on the topic there was a clear recognition of skills in mediative practice, the lack of external and internal recognition of the individual as a professional 'mediator' was prevalent. Thus, this lack of inclusion of Track 2 and 3 negotiations within figures on women in mediation clearly skews the reality that there are many more women skilled in mediative practice that is officially recognised. Of course, the figures for women in high-level mediation is still unacceptable, but by broadening the scope of how we understand peace mediators there is a greater knowledge of who has the experience and how that experience can be recognised and professionalised in order to elevate women to high-level negotiations. As noted by Turner (2019, 249) if the mediation skills demonstrated by women at the Track 2 and Track 3 are not understood to be mediation it seems that the first 'barrier to women's visibility is definitional'. This short analysis of the Irish case supports this claim.

## References

- Bagshaw, D. 2009. 'Challenging Western constructs of mediation.' In *Mediation in the Asia-Pacific Region: Transforming conflicts and building peace*, 13–30. edited by Dale Bagshaw and Elizabeth Porter. Routledge.
- Bell, C., S. Badanjak, R. Forster, A. Jamar, K. McNicholl, K. Nash, J. Pospisil, L. Wise. 2019. PA-X Codebook, Version 1. Political Settlements Research Programme, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh. [www.peaceagreements.org](http://www.peaceagreements.org)
- Charlesworth, H. 2008. 'Are Women Peaceful? Reflections on the Role of Women in Peace- Building.' *Feminist Legal Studies* 16: 347–361.
- Cockburn, C. and Zarkov, D., eds. 2002. *The Post-war Moment: Militaries, Masculinities and International Peacekeeping*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Cohn, C. ed. 2013. *Women and wars: Contested histories, uncertain futures*. John Wiley & Sons.
- De Alwis, Malathi, Julie Mertus, Tazreena Sajjad. 2013. In *Women and Wars: Toward a Conceptual Framework*, 169–193, edited by Carol Cohn. Wiley.
- Henshaw, A. L. 2016. *Why Women Rebel: Understanding Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups*. Taylor & Francis.
- Hudson, H. 2009. 'Peacebuilding through a gender lens and the challenges of implementation in Rwanda and Côte d'Ivoire.' *Security Studies*, 18(2): 287–318.
- Hudson, H. 2016. 'Decolonizing the mainstreaming of gender in peacebuilding: toward an agenda for Africa.' *African Peacebuilding Network (APN) Working Paper*, 8.
- Kampwirth K. 2004. *Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas*. Ohio: Centre for International Studies.
- Ní Aoláin, F. 2016. 'The relationship of political settlement analysis to peacebuilding from a feminist perspective.' *Peacebuilding* 4: 151–165.
- O'Reilly, M. 2013. 'Women in Conflict Mediation.' Issue Brief, International Peace Institute.
- Paffenholz, T, N. Ross, S. Dixon, A-L Schluchter, and J. True. 2016 'Making Women Count – Not Just Counting Women: Assessing Women's Inclusion and Influence on Peace Negotiations' Report. Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative and UN Women.

## References

- Potter, A. 2005 'We the Women: Why conflict mediation is not just a job for men.' Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.
- Ramsbottom, O., T. Woodhall, and H. Miall. 2011. *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 171–275. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Riley, H. and E. Murphy. 2020. 'Building Networks; Voices of Women in Peace Mediation on the Island of Ireland' Report. Available at: <https://www.ucd.ie/ibis/research/currentresearch/irishconsortiumonthepromotionofwomeninpeacemediationandnegotiations/>
- Shepherd, L. J. 2016. 'Victims of violence or agents of change? Representations of women in UN peacebuilding discourse.' *Peacebuilding* 4: 121–135.
- Thomas, J. and K. Bond (2015) 'Women's Participation in Violent Political Organizations,' *American Political Science Review* 109(3): 488–506.
- Turner, C. 2018. 'Absent or Invisible? Women Mediators and the United Nations.' Research Brief. *Global Policy Review*, 9(2).
- Turner, C. 2019. 'Soft ways of doing hard things: women mediators and the question of gender in mediation.' *Peacebuilding*.
- United Nations. 2012. 'Guidance for Effective Mediation.' Available at: <https://peacemaker.un.org/guidance-effective-mediation>
- UN Women' 2015. 'Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Security the Peace: Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325'. Available at: [http://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015%20(1).pdf)

# VICTIMS, SURVIVORS, AND THE RECONCILIATION PARADIGM

Joseph S. Robinson





# VICTIMS, SURVIVORS, AND THE RECONCILIATION PARADIGM

## Abstract

Most scholars and practitioners of peacebuilding and transitional justice tend to work under what I refer to as the reconciliation paradigm. This paradigm accepts the contention that difficult pasts can and should be mediated in order to enable a peaceful and just co-existence. Yet critical scholars of transition regimes point out that reconciliation can be instrumentalised by powerful actors invested in 'drawing a line' under contentious pasts. Others argue that reconciliatory discourses minimise transitional legal and institutional inadequacies.

This paper calls attention to the ways in which the reconciliation paradigm can impose a dominant temporality on victims and survivors. This imposition takes the form of widespread social and political expectations and pressures to 'move on' or reconcile to the post-conflict status quo. In this context, the reconciliation paradigm is viewed with deep scepticism by many victim and survivor communities in Northern Ireland. Many understand the paradigm as domesticating and depoliticising; an entreaty to abandon the types of political struggles that upset or inconvenience transitional governance. This paper ultimately reminds scholars and practitioners that, for reconciliation to be salvaged, it must not be allowed to become an instrument of 'closing the books' on the past.

**KEYWORDS:** *Reconciliation; temporality; Northern Ireland; transitional justice.*

## Reconciliation 'is' dead

In 2019, the hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en Nation rejected the construction of the multi-billion dollar Coastal GasLink pipeline through their traditional land in northern British Columbia (Canada). When the Liberal government of Justin Trudeau refused to cease construction of the pipeline, much of Canada was gripped by a series of Indigenous-led 'land protection' actions, including blockades, encampments, and occupations. Land protection was a tactic that proved highly disruptive to the Canadian government and Canadian economy, as protestors occupied not only sections of the proposed pipeline route, but a series of other crucial transport infrastructure points throughout Canada. Many of the banners unveiled at these occupations carried a stark and provocative slogan, one that quickly became the semi-official slogan of land protectors inspired by the Wet'suwet'en struggle: 'Reconciliation is dead.'<sup>1</sup>

The slogan particularly refers to the Canadian official Truth and Reconciliation process,

---

1. The most well-known of these occupations was the Unist'ot'en Camp along the proposed pipeline route. See <https://unistoten.camp/reconciliationisdead/>.

active from 2008–2015, which was established to document and acknowledge the lasting harm of the Canadian Indian Residential School system. However, for many Indigenous Canadians, the government's continuing recourse to force to extract resources from indigenous land reveals that the reconciliation process was little more than an exercise in liberal public relations by successive Canadian governments (Talaga 2020). Scholars allege that the concept of reconciliation has been similarly abused in a variety of other post-conflict and post-colonial contexts (Short 2008; Wilson 2001) including Northern Ireland (McGrattan 2016; Robinson 2020). While Canada's conceptual framework of 'reconciliation' is not coterminous with Northern Ireland, this paper argues that 'reconciliation is dead' carries with it a stark warning for other societies struggling to deal with the legacies of historical violence.

Following Damien Short (2005), I argue that both scholarly and practice-based understandings of transitional justice and peacebuilding are underwritten by the 'reconciliation paradigm,' or a widespread acceptance that the memory, commemoration, and operationalisation of violent, colonial, oppressive, and/or unjust pasts must be mediated to produce a future predicated on tolerance, liberal values and co-existence. Here, the multiple meanings of the word 'reconciliation' come into play. On one hand, 'to reconcile' can mean 'to restore (a person) to friendly relations with oneself or another.' This is traditionally how reconciliation has been thought of in transitional justice and related disciplines, especially in those disciplines inflected with Christian origins (e.g. Lederach 1999; 1997). But 'to reconcile' can also mean 'to bring (a person) into a state of acquiescence with, acceptance or, or submission to a thing, situation, etc.'<sup>2</sup> For many survivors of historical violence, oppression, or injustice, such as the Wet'suwet'en and other Indigenous peoples (see Corntassel and Holder 1998; Short 2012) the second definition of reconciliation has overtaken the first. The reconciliatory paradigm risks becoming an engine of imposed forgetting, depoliticisation, and political domestication; a demand that survivors of political violence 'acquiesce or submit to' the post-conflict *status quo*.

This short paper will first examine the theoretical roots of the reconciliatory paradigm before moving to a specific, if cursory, treatment of how the paradigm arrived in and has been applied to Northern Ireland's post-conflict space. Drawing on several years of work with victims and survivors of political violence in Northern Ireland, I argue that reconciliation in Northern Ireland is increasingly becoming a cynical cover for political-institutional failings and a purposefully ambiguous signifier. I conclude by reflecting on whether the promise of reconciliation can be salvaged from the more instrumental and depoliticising aspects of the reconciliation paradigm.

---

2. Both definitions taken from the Oxford English Dictionary, Online.

## Memory and the reconciliation paradigm

The roots of the reconciliation paradigm are diverse, with many different theoretical, philosophical, and spiritual starting-points, however, the paradigm coalesces and turns on a specific form of *temporality*, namely, that the 'past' should be mediated, harnessed, or 'worked-through' in order to better serve the future. While few argue that the violent or harmful past should be collectively forgotten (but see Reiff 2016), philosophers as diverse as Ernst Renan, Friedrich Nietzsche, Desmond Tutu, and Paul Ricoeur have all argued that the possibilities of different collective futures depend on selectively forgetting of aspects of a difficult past. In the reconciliation paradigm, the past can be reimagined in order to become 'usable' (Olick 2007). Ricoeur (2004), for example, argues those aspects of the past that stand for justice and presage the possibility of narrative hospitality and productive encounter should be retained and championed, those that do not, selectively transcended.

This futurity is a near constant throughout modern philosophies of reconciliation. Rigby (2001, 12) asserts that '[reconciliation] refers to the future,' and is 'the preparedness of people to anticipate a shared future.' For Bar-Tal (2009, 363), reconciliation is the evolution of a new 'social repertoire' 'that can serve as a basis for a culture of peace.' For still others, reconciliation consists of 'transforming the relations between rival sides, from hostility and resentment, to friendly and harmonious relations' (Bar-Siman-Tov 2004, 72). Major debates and criticisms exist within the reconciliation paradigm, including should reconciliation be thought of as a process or an outcome (Bar-Tal & Bennink 2004), whether or not reconciliation depends on widespread cultural, relational and attitudinal change in a given society (Humphrey 2012), and the role and alleged necessity of 'forgiveness' within the reconciliatory paradigm (Hamber 2007). However, there is little internal debate within the paradigm over the necessity of 'mediating' a 'usable past,' what Graham Dawson terms 'reparative memory' (2007) or what John Brewer (2010) refers to as 're-remembering for the future.' As Rigney argues, transitional justice and peace studies have accepted as virtually axiomatic the belief that 'the mediated production of common memory narratives can and should be "engineered" (orchestrated, managed) in order to become productive of a peaceful and just co-existence' (2012, 251–2). Even more agonistic and radical perspectives remain deeply wedded to reconciliation's potential emancipatory futurity (e.g. Schaap 2005).

Thus, while the dominant view within transitional justice is that reconciliation (and forgiveness) cannot be imposed on a subject or on a subject population, reconciliation does privilege futurist temporalities and usable pasts. The reconciliation paradigm hinges on a specific type of *chrononormativity*, the imposition of a default or a proper means of temporal progression (Freeman 2010). Temporalities of transition tend to demand a 'clean break' with the past, the temporal separation of a past characterised by violence, colonialism, or authoritarianism, and an idealised tolerant, liberal, reconciled future (Robinson 2020; 2018). For survivors who see the wounds of the past as still radically present and unresolved, or those who do not accept official and often-

artificially delineated temporal periods for grief and mourning, the chrononormativity of the reconciliation paradigm projects them into spaces of ‘permanent liminality,’ where they are forever ‘out-of-step with’ or ‘backwards’ in terms of the dominant temporalities of transition (Murphy and McDowell 2019; Mueller-Hirth 2017).

Much in Northern Ireland has been made of the so-called hierarchy of victims’ debate, or the argument that some victims of violence, due generally to their own actions or because they were members of paramilitary organisations, are not [as] deserving of being politically recognised or afforded social resources as victims (see Hearty 2016; Jankowitz 2018). But what the preceding criticism suggests is that the reconciliation paradigm creates a different, *temporal*, hierarchy of victim. At the top of the hierarchy are those victims who have grieved for an appropriate amount of time and *reconciled themselves* to the post-conflict order, whether through forgiveness or an acceptance of a societal pressure to ‘move on.’ The ‘dominant linear temporality of peace processes and transitional justice’ (Mueller-Hirth 2017, 187) constructs and imposes a set of social expectations that produces a different, much less-studied hierarchy of victims. Those victims and survivors unable or unwilling to conform to internalised social expectations are rendered anachronistic, out of place in a society determinedly moving towards the ‘future’ (Robinson 2020). Additionally, the dominant temporality of the reconciliation paradigm conditions and shapes the boundaries of what types of justice it is possible to expect and what appeals to justice are seen as ‘reasonable.’ The durations of extended campaigns, lengthy court procedures, protracted forensic [re-] examinations, all of these *longue durée* processes are deeply inconvenient to the accelerationist impulses hardwired into the reconciliatory paradigm. Survivors for whom the search for justice is predicated on the *longue durée* will especially experience intense social pressure to ‘move on’ and ‘leave the past behind,’ even to the extent of being labelled “peace spoilers” (Rios Oyola 2018).

In Northern Ireland however, these reconciliatory expectations are paradoxically imposed on victims and survivors in spite of the fact that the consociational structure of the Irish Peace Process institutionally ‘discourages’ political reconciliation and incentivises division at the macro-level (see Graham & Nash 2006; Ní Aoláin and Brown 2015). In this context, mobilising the reconciliation paradigm can be seen as a means of distracting from legal-institutional failings and shifting the blame for failing to realise ‘a shared future’ onto the backs of anachronistic and allegedly recalcitrant victims and survivors (for example, Brewer 2010; Graham 2014). This is the allegation levelled by Alejandro Castillejo-Cuellar (2014) in his study of the reconciliation paradigm in South Africa and Colombia. He argues that ‘discourses of “national unity and reconciliation” that compel a society to “look to the future,” to “turn the page,” to “leave the past behind,” and to “forgive and reconcile,”’ are actually techniques designed to elide transitional legalism’s ‘structural inability’ to reckon with the root causes of violence. By promising citizens a ‘new future,’ the reconciliation paradigm elides persistent structural violence and entrenched inequality in the present. It is no small wonder in this context

that politically active victims and survivors who believe that they and their memories of historical injury have been sacrificed on the altars of these 'new futures' might declaim the death of reconciliation.

### Reconciliation in 'post' conflict Northern Ireland

While the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement contained next to nothing pertaining to 'dealing with the past,' the reconciliation paradigm undergirded every subsequent independent Commission's Report and the strictures of every major social development initiative (McGrattan 2013; Robinson 2018). The Eames-Bradley Report (2009, 24) has perhaps the clearest expression of the temporality of the reconciliation paradigm: 'The past should be dealt with in a manner which enables society to become more defined by its desire for true and lasting reconciliation rather than by division and mistrust, seeking to promote a shared and reconcile future for all.' The scholars Brandon Hamber and Gráinne Kelly first attempted to flesh out a working definition of reconciliation in 2004. Their definition comes in the form a 5-stranded equal typology. They explicitly state that no strand is more or less important than another; indeed Hamber and Kelly's is one of the only attempts at defining reconciliation where reckoning with the past is not explicitly or implicitly subordinated to the imperative of building a new future. This should not be surprising considering Hamber's prior critical work of the futurity of reconciliation in South Africa (Hamber and Wilson, 2002). However, while initial policy documents such as a *A Shared Future* (2005) did adopt slightly more-complex iterations of 'reconciliation,' they privileged Hamber and Kelly's third strand, building positive relationships, and jettisoned an equal focus on past violence. *A Shared Future* was superseded by *Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC)* in 2013 where a definition of reconciliation is never attempted and left purposefully ambiguous throughout. In T:BUC and the aborted Haass/O'Sullivan proposals, also from 2013, reconciliation is treated as little more than an airy aspiration.

The increasing emptiness of reconciliation as a signifier has allowed it to be harnessed to political agendas deeply invested in 'drawing a line' underneath the Northern Irish Troubles. Consider first David Cameron's well-publicised apology after the unveiling of the Report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry in Derry/Londonderry on 15 June 2010. After proclaiming that 'openness and frankness about the past, however painful, they do not make us weaker, they make us stronger.' Cameron closed his speech by arguing that the report necessitated that '[Northern Ireland] come together to close this painful chapter on Northern Ireland's troubled past. That is not to say we should ever forget or dismiss the past, but we must also move on.'<sup>3</sup> Cameron's instrumentalisation of the reconciliatory paradigm attempts to sever the painful past from the idealised 'new future', in the process it attempts to cast those who objected to any of the report's findings, or the lack of prosecutions, or those who might resist future attempts at

---

3. Full text available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/10322295>. Accessed 24 June 2020.

amnesty for the paratroopers, as anachronistic, as excluded from the new future inaugurated by the report. Continuing to campaign for justice or politicise Bloody Sunday falls afoul of the sharp proclamation of a new future. Indeed the recent proposals laid out by current Secretary of State Brandon Lewis, that many have argued eviscerate even the limited legacy proposals in the Stormont House Agreement, have been justified by claiming 'swift, final examinations' and 'ending vexatious claims against veterans' are tantamount to promoting "reconciliation" (Lewis 2020).

Sinn Féin has similarly taken advantage of the malleability of reconciliation to politically instrumentalise the concept, as, to lesser extents, have other major political parties in Ireland and Britain (Bean 2007; McGrattan 2016). Taking their cue from *A Shared Future's* heavy reliance on the relational strand of Hamber and Kelly's typology, Sinn Féin has promoted a version of reconciliation that at least superficially seems to echo Paul Ricoeur's. In their semi-official reconciliation document (Sinn Féin 2015), they argue that reconciliation is enabled through mutual recognition of political narratives of the conflict. This recognition comes through 'uncomfortable conversations' between the two supposed ethno-political blocs in Northern Ireland. The document frames these conversations as bravely begun by Republicans and not reciprocated by Unionists (Hedges 2016). More importantly, it uses the framework of mutual recognition to assert that reconciliation necessarily entails recognition of a narrative that presents Republican violence as a justifiable campaign against a colonial occupier. Refusal to recognise and acknowledge the viability of this framing in turn becomes a refusal to reconcile. Those who suffered or were killed by republican violence in turn become anachronistic, out-of-step with the promise of a reconciled future.

That the reconciliation paradigm has been instrumentalised by political actors largely uninterested in revisiting their own culpability in past violence should not be surprising. Rather, we as scholars and peace practitioners need to understand that the dominant linear temporality and idealised futurity hard-wired into the reconciliation paradigm paves the way for these sorts of instrumentalisations. Widespread societal expectations heaped on victims and survivors to 'move on' or 'come to terms' with the past are implicit demands to 'reconcile to' the often unjust post-conflict status quo.

### **Building peace in the reconciliation paradigm**

Critics of the reconciliation paradigm do not reject the aspiration to live in a peaceful, just, and tolerant society. Rather, they seek to highlight the discrepancies, and especially the temporal discrepancies, between what politicised victims often campaign for and the horizons of political possibility within transitional societies (Robinson 2018; Mueller-Hirth 2017). Rather, this short interrogation of the reconciliation paradigm is an appeal to scholars and peace practitioners to recognise, acknowledge, and reflect on the dominant futurity woven through appeals to reconciliation in Northern Ireland. When we internalise this futurity, we often, consciously or not, shift the alleged social duty to



reconcile onto the backs of victims and survivors, who are often the most vulnerable in a given post-conflict or transitional society.

In my recent work with the Peace IV funded Glencree Legacy of Violence Project (LOV), I had the opportunity to query how politicised victims and survivors viewed reconciliatory appeals in Northern Ireland. What I discovered consistently is that many victims and survivors do not reject reconciliation out of hand, rather they reject a socially imposed obligation to reconcile with those people and institutions responsible for inflicting violence on them, an obligation they perceive as not merely coming from former-perpetrators but woven throughout official and unofficial legacy processes and interventions. As one survivor put it to me during the LOV project:

‘Generally speaking, we’re nearly convinced as a [victim and survivors] group, we’re nearly convinced that we’re part of the problem. No. We’re not part of the problem!... They say our loved ones were the problem, well they weren’t! But we’ve been battered that long with the same story... You know, we’re happy enough to move on, but it can’t always be us, us, us.’

What we as scholars and practitioners need to remember is that demanding that the violent, painful, and traumatic past be kept alive in the present is not a failure to reconcile, it is also a powerful political corrective to a post-conflict or post-colonial status quo often eager to selectively forget its culpability in a violent past through the imposition of accelerationist temporal frameworks. If the reconciliation paradigm is to remain a credible means of advancing our shared goals to live in peaceful, tolerant, and just societies, the burden or duty of reconciliation must shift away from victims and survivors and onto the people and institutions most responsible for the infliction of harm and violence. If not, it may be that reconciliation will die, it will cease to be a credible means of promoting healthy relationships and communities and become a mere rhetorical device bluntly wielded by the instruments of power seeking to insulate themselves from any further consequences of past wrongdoing.

## References

- Bar-Simon-Tov, Yaacov. 2004. 'Dialectics Between Stable Peace and Reconciliation. In *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, 1<sup>st</sup> edn., edited by Yaacov Bar-Simon-Tov, 61–80. Oxford University Press.
- Bar-Tal, Daniel. 2009. 'Reconciliation as a Foundation of a Culture of Peace.' In *Handbook on Building Cultures of Peace*, edited by Joseph de Rivera, 363–377. Springer.
- Bar-Tal, Daniel and Gemma H. Bennink. 'The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process.' In *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, 1<sup>st</sup> edn., edited by Yaacov Bar-Simon-Tov, 11–38. Oxford University Press.
- Bean, Kevin. 2007. *The New Politics of Sinn Féin*. Liverpool University Press.
- Brewer, John D. 2010. *Peace Processes: A Sociological Approach*. Polity.
- Brown, Kris and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin. 2015. 'Through the Looking Glass: Transitional Justice Futures Through the Lens of Nationalism, Feminism and Transformative Change'. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 9(1): 127-149.
- Castillejo-Cuellar, Alejandro. 2013. 'Historical Injuries, Temporality, and the Law: Articulations of a Violent Past in Two Transitional Scenarios.' *Law and Critique*, 25(1): 47–66.
- Corntassel, Jeff and Cindy Holder. 2008. 'Who's Sorry Now? Government Apologies, Truth Commissions, and Indigenous Self-Determination in Australia, Canada, Guatemala, and Peru.' *Human Rights Review*, 9: 465–489.
- Dawson, Graham. 2007. *Making Peace with the Past?: Memory, Trauma, and the Irish Troubles*. Manchester University Press.
- Eames, Robin and Dennis Bradley. 2009. *Report of the Consultative Group on the Past*. Northern Ireland Office. Accessed 24 June from: [https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/victims/docs/consultative\\_group/cgp\\_230109\\_report.pdf](https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/victims/docs/consultative_group/cgp_230109_report.pdf)
- Freeman, Elizabeth. 2010. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Duke University Press.
- Graham, Brian and Catherine Nash. 2006. 'A Shared Future: Territoriality, Pluralism and Public Policy in Northern Ireland.' *Political Geography*, 25(3): 253–278.
- Graham, Laura F. 2014. 'The 'Innocent Victims of the Troubles and the Enduring Impediment to Peace in Northern Ireland'. *Shared Space*, 17: 37–54.

## References

- Hamber, Brandon. 2007. 'Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Paradise Lost or Pragmatism?' *Peace and Conflict*, 13(1): 115–125.
- Hamber, Brandon and Graíne Kelly. 2004. 'Reconciliation: A Working Definition.' *Democratic Dialogue*, accessed 23 June 2020 from <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/dd/papers/dd04recondef.pdf>
- Hamber, Brandon and Richard A. Wilson. 2002. 'Symbolic Closure Through Memory, Reparation and Revenge in Post-Conflict Societies.' *Journal of Human Rights*, 1(1): 35–53.
- Hearty, Kevin. 2016. 'Legislating Hierarchies of Victimhood and Perpetrators: The Civil Service (Special Advisers) Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 and the meta-conflict.' *Social and Legal Studies*, 25(2): 333–353.
- Hedges, John. 2016. 'Reconciliation Requires Partnership, Declan Kearney Tells Sinn Féin Ard Fheis.' *An Phoblacht*. Online. <https://www.anphoblacht.com/contents/25954> Accessed 24 June 2020.
- Humphrey, Michael. 2012. 'Marginalizing "Victims"' and "Terrorists": Modes of Exclusion in the Reconciliation Process.' In *Reconciliation After Terrorism: Strategy, Possibility, or Absurdity*, edited by Renner, Judith and Alexander Spencer, 48–67. Routledge.
- Jankowitz, Sarah E. 2018. 'The "Hierarchy of Victims" in Northern Ireland: A Framework for Critical Analysis.' *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 12(2): 216–236.
- Lawther, Cheryl. 2014. *Truth, Denial, and Transition: Northern Ireland and the Contested Past*. Routledge.
- Lederach, John-Paul. 1997. *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. U. S. Institute of Peace.
- Lederach, John-Paul. 1999. *The Journey Toward Reconciliation*. Herald Press.
- Lewis, Brandon. 2020. *UK Government Sets Out Way Forward on the Legacy of the Past in Northern Ireland*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-government-sets-out-way-forward-on-the-legacy-of-the-past-in-northern-ireland>. Accessed 24 June 2020.
- McGrattan, Cillian. 2016. 'Ideology, Reconciliation and Nationalism in Northern Ireland.' *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 21(1): 61–77.

## References

- McGrattan, Cillian. 2013. *Memory, Politics, Identity: Haunted by History*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mueller-Hirth, Natascha. 2017. 'Temporalities of Victimhood: Time in the Study of Post-conflict Societies.' *Sociological Forum*, 32(1): 186–206.
- Murphy, Joanne and Sara McDowell. 2019. 'Transitional Optics: Exploring Liminal Spaces After Conflict.' *Urban Studies*, 56(12): 2499–2514.
- Olick, Jeffrey K. 2007. 'From Usable Pasts to the Return of the Repressed.' *The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture*, 9(2): 19–32.
- Ricoeur, Paul. 2004. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. University of Chicago Press.
- Rieff, David. 2016. *In Praise of Forgetting: Historical Memory and its Ironies*. Yale University Press.
- Rigby, Andrew. 2001. *Justice and Reconciliation: After the Violence*. Lynne Reinner Publishers.
- Rigney, Ann. 2012. 'Reconciliation and Remembering: (How) Does it Work?' *Memory Studies*, 5(3): 251–258.
- Rios Oyola, Sandra. 2018. 'Peace Processes and Social Acceleration: The Case of Colombia.' In *Time and Temporality in Transitional and Post-Conflict Societies*, edited by Natascha Mueller-Hirth and Sandra Rios Oyola, 50–64. Routledge.
- Robinson, Joseph S. 2020. "'We have Long Memories in this Area': Ulster Defence Regiment Place-Memory along the Irish Border.' *Memory Studies* (Early View): 1–16.
- Robinson, Joseph S. 2018. *Transitional Justice and the Politics of Inscription: Memory, Space, and Narrative in Northern Ireland*. Routledge.
- Schaap, Andrew. 2005. *Political Reconciliation*. Routledge.
- Short, Damien. 2005. "Reconciliation and the Problem of Internal Colonialism." *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 26(3): 267–282.

## References

- Short, Damien. 2008. *Reconciliation and Colonial Power: Indigenous Rights in Australia*. Ashgate.
- Short, Damien. 2012. 'When Sorry isn't Good Enough: Official Remembrance and Reconciliation in Australia.' *Memory Studies*, 5(3): 293–304.
- Sinn Féin. 2015. *Uncomfortable Conversations: An Initiative for Dialogue Towards Reconciliation*. Sinn Féin.
- Talaga, Tanya. 2020. 'Reconciliation isn't Dead. It Never Truly Existed.' *The Globe and Mail*, 29 February 2020. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-reconciliation-isnt-dead-it-never-truly-existed/>
- Wilson, Richard A. 2001. *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*. Cambridge University Press.

# **“IS IT ALWAYS GOING BE THIS WAY?”: LEGACIES OF THE TROUBLES AND THE HOLY CROSS GIRLS PRIMARY SCHOOL DISPUTE**

**Eimear Rosato**





# "IS IT ALWAYS GOING TO BE THIS WAY?": LEGACIES OF THE TROUBLES AND THE HOLY CROSS GIRLS PRIMARY SCHOOL DISPUTE

## Abstract

This article examines the embedded nature of memory and identity within place through a case study of the Holy Cross Girls Primary School 'incident' in North Belfast. In 2001, whilst walking to and from school, the pupils of this primary school aged between 4-11 years old, faced daily hostile mobs of unionist/loyalists protesters. These protesters threw stones, bottles, balloons filled with urine, fireworks and other projectiles including a blast bomb (Chris Gilligan 2009, 32). The 'incident' derived from a culmination of long-term sectarian tensions across the interface between nationalist/republican Ardoyne and unionist/loyalist Glenbryn. Utilising oral history interviews conducted in 2016–2017 with twelve young people from the Ardoyne community, it will explore their personal experiences and how this event has shaped their identities, memory, understanding of the conflict and approaches to reconciliation.

KEY WORDS: *Oral history, Northern Ireland, intergenerational memory, reconciliation*

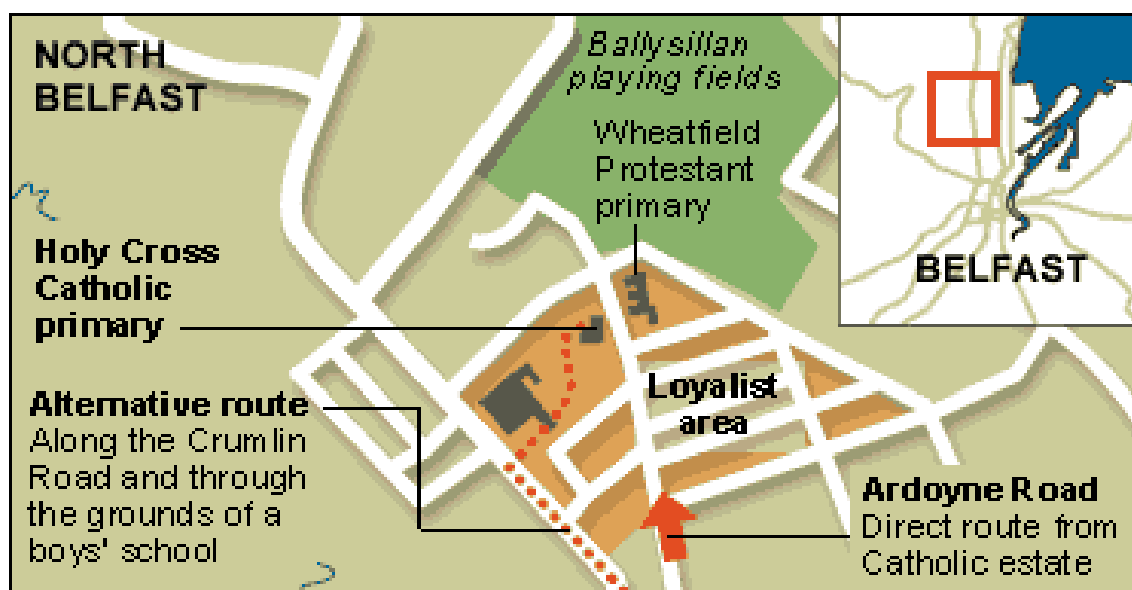
## Introduction

Legacies and memories of the past are engrained within territorial boundaries, sites of memory and cultural artefacts. Maurice Halbwachs (1992), the founding father of memory studies, believed that individuals as a group remember, collectively or socially, with the past being understood through ritualism and symbols. Pierre Nora's (1989) research builds and expands on Halbwachs, arguing that memory 'crystallises' itself in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. Memory instils remembrance within the sacred; it takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects. For Northern Ireland (NI), memory is embedded in its streets, commemorative events, murals and a range of images and symbols.

Paul Connerton (1989) focuses on the social role of remembrances and recollections and highlights that Halbwachs neglects the trans-generational transmission of memories. According to Connerton, there is a transmission of memories, down the generations, building on this Thompson (2009, 195) characterises intergenerational memories as, 'accounts of past events or people that are passed on from one generation to the next in a family, nation or community. They do this by means of stories, which are told by parents, teachers or community elders.' In the NI context, Cairns and Roe (2003, 41) emphasise the concept of social, collective or ethnic memory, highlighting the importance of shared memories of injustices, atrocities and heroism in conflict. Bar-

Tal's (2003, 89) work building on Nora's *Sites of Memory* discusses rituals, ceremonies, music and displays that are presented in a particular time and place for communicating meanings relating to conflict. Bar-Tal argues that in conflict and post-conflict times, rituals and ceremonies contribute to the persistence of the conflict and express attitudes towards it. His research echoes Connerton's analysis that the past continues to impact on the present. This body of work provides the theoretical and conceptual framework applied in this article to make sense of place, memory and legacies of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

The research methodology relied on Oral History as the primary medium. This was effective in facilitating the often hidden and unheard voices of young people to be documented and provided the space to recount the impact of one of the most widely reported sectarian 'incidents' in the history of the NI conflict. The sample included twelve participants; five females who attended Holy Cross Primary School at the time of the dispute, five males who grew up in Ardoyne, one female who did not attend Holy Cross and one female who walked with the girls from Holy Cross Girls School in solidarity, but did not attend Holy Cross.<sup>1</sup> All are residents of Ardoyne. The interviews were recorded in 2016–2017, then transcribed and thematically analysed.



*Fig.1. The Guardian Newspaper online, 'Violence returns to disputed Belfast School, 4th Sept 2001.*

## Background: The 'Dispute'<sup>2</sup>

Before the Troubles, Alliance Avenue in North Belfast was a mixed street of both Catholic and Protestant residents, bordering the nationalist/Catholic Ardoyne and the Protestant/ unionist Glenbryn. By 1971 the British Army had erected a makeshift peace line and by the 1980s the peace wall stood 40-foot-high cementing the division (Heatley 2004). These shifts in population constructed sectarian enclaves and modes of physical segregation of communities that became sites where tensions frequently erupted. Ardoyne Road (which links onto Alliance Avenue) remains an interface area, a contentious site bordering both Ardoyne and Glenbryn communities.<sup>3</sup> Holy Cross Girls Primary School (hereafter Holy Cross) is situated on Ardoyne Road, 300 meters beyond where the territorial boundaries of Catholic/nationalist Ardoyne end at Alliance Avenue (Figure 1). For the duration of the dispute, the pupils of Holy Cross had to walk 300m along Ardoyne Road to get to school through the Protestant/unionist community of Glenbryn, the site of unrest.

According to journalist Anne Cadwallader (2004) in her seminal work *Holy Cross: The Untold Story*, the reasoning behind the initial rioting is contentious, but it can be said that the dispute began on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2001, one week before the end of term for the pupils of Holy Cross. Brent Never (2010, 467) suggests that a group of young men from Ardoyne confronted a group from Glenbryn as they were hanging British flags along Ardoyne Road. This contentious encounter brought large numbers of fractious community residents on to the streets. This left the pupils of Holy Cross trapped in the school by angered Glenbryn residents. Over the next three days the walk to school was confronted by turbulent protests of angry Glenbryn residents, punctuated by verbal abuse and hurling missiles. The fourth day reached a 'dangerous crescendo' with a blast bomb being thrown at the parents and children (Never 2010, 469). Community worker Jim Potts in a contemporaneous interview stated that the entire dispute was around 'territory' and called for the school to be closed as 'this is a loyalist community' (Cadwallader 2004, 308). The protest continued into the new school year in September with daily protests and in the evening riots between the two communities and spilled over into confrontation with the PSNI. The dispute ended in November 2001 with the promise of tighter security and a redevelopment scheme for the Glenbryn community.

Pierre Nora, (1996, 3) one of the principal theorists of place and space argues that 'memory is always embodied in living societies' and place becomes significant when memory attaches itself to it. As discussed shortly, the place or site of memory becomes the object to which other attributes are assigned, such as emotions of fear. In the context of the case study of the Holy Cross dispute, a site of traumatic memories lies in the 600m stretch of road from the Ardoyne shops to the gates of the Holy Cross School. As Shirlow and Murtagh (2006, 4) argued, violence around housing, the location of schools and other territorial conflicts highlights the 'paucity of a peace process' which covers the reality that sectarianism has remained embedded within the society. NI hosts

---

2. The terminology for the events that took place is contested, however, for this article both dispute and incident are used interchangeably.

many sites of tangible memory, according to Hoelscher and Alderman (2004, 349) such as prisons and bomb sites, but taking the Holy Cross dispute as an example, I want to focus here on the 'invisible' nature of this memory, as not all boundaries and interfaces have physical manifestations of territory.

### **Boundaries and emotions**

Connolly and Healy's (2004) research in NI, indicates that by the age of ten years old, children have a strong sense of boundaries and express fear of venturing beyond their local areas. Many parents set geographical boundaries to ensure safety, but this restriction or articulation of the restriction becomes the first experiences of the conflict for many young people. As one interviewee put it, 'it's like Ardoyne... is its own wee bubble and that's where I had to stay because that's where I was safe' (Int 4:M). Another reflected, that his family still say, 'don't be going up that road now' (Int 3:M). An explicit articulation of the embeddedness of boundaries as a continued part of everyday life in Ardoyne.

As noted, five of the oral history participants had attended Holy Cross during the dispute and all expressed fear when discussing boundaries. One interviewee described how she was 'terrified of what was across the boundary' (Int 8: F) and said that her fear was based on lived experience of what she had undergone daily during the Holy Cross dispute. Similarly, another participant commented that when seeing Union Jacks, 'you have this innate response to (pause) I dunno... you were raised in a way to... sort of almost fear it' (Int3:M). Interviews with parents are detailed throughout Cadwalladers book, detailing the manifestations of fear and anxiety 'they [their daughters] were frightened to leave Ardoyne with their school uniforms on. If they were out in the car, they would duck down on the floor in the back if they saw a Union Jack flag.' (2004, 132)

What may be drawn from this is that even at such a young age the participants had a heightened consciousness of flags and colour symbolism correlated with the different communities and territorial boundaries, and this was associated with fear. This reinforced the fear that existed outside of their 'safe space' of Ardoyne. Leonard notes how children can play an active role in constructing a sense of place within divided spaces, whilst simultaneously being influenced by social structures (2010, 329–330). These memories of the walk to school and the fears associated with that space had the ability to manifest sectarian-based associations of space within these young children. Peter Shirlow (2001, 69) argues that the creation of illusionary spaces or peace lines enforce a perpetual search for the safety of spatial enclosure. This argument is reiterated by Leonard (2008, 476) who discusses the salience of localism which she argues is intensified by the creation of peace walls and lines that reinforce the perception of safe or unsafe areas. Flags act as boundary markings, indicators of safety, the young pupils of Holy Cross understood their school was situated in a 'non safe' space, resulting in the manifestation of anxieties and fear.

## Silence and intergenerational memory

Marianne Hirsch (2012, 5) when discussing intergenerational trauma (or postmemory) in Holocaust survivors, argued that a connection to the past is mediated through representation, projection and creation, which is often based on storytelling, oversharing or silence. The research I conducted found that NI has a prevailing culture of silence, akin to what Angela Connolly describes as 'deathly silence' (2011, 609). It was also clear throughout the interviews that particular deeply traumatic events – such as Holy Cross - or topics relating to the Troubles were shrouded in silence. Hirsch discusses how silences are acted out through over 'protectedness' or in the case of NI, as demonstrated above, boundary control. When discussing the dispute one interviewee said, 'I don't really talk to anyone about this, it's the elephant in the room sometimes. We [family] wouldn't necessarily bring it up, so you're not really used to dealing with the emotions of it' (Int8: F). She went on to say:

'My mummy didn't really go into it and I think she was afraid to go into it, when we have kind of spoke about it briefly since then, she said [mother] she didn't want me to know too much, and she definitely didn't want my brother to know too much.'

This interviewee then explained that due to the silence, fear and confusion her younger sibling stopped speaking for a few months. With no guidance on how to deal with such a traumatic experience some parents, like the previous interviewee, did not talk about or explain the situation, believing that this would reduce the lasting effect on their daughters. This mechanism of silence has also been used when dealing with the trauma from the Troubles itself according to both Graham Dawson (2007, 63) and Cheryl Lawther (2013) in her research on transitional justice in NI. As indicated in the report from the Commission of Victims and Survivors in 2011, around 61 percent of the NI adult population have experienced a traumatic event within their lifetime, and these individuals are more likely to suffer from a 'post-conflict' disorder or mental health issues ranging from PTSD to mood swings to substance abuse.

Within the interviews some participants talked about the detrimental impact of silence:

'So, I think having them actually sit down and talk to me and tell me honest and logical reason for it, it helped to make it logical in my head... Kids make their own assumptions why they were getting beat up going to school' (Int 1:F).

Another interview reflected:

'I didn't really like understand what was happening, I just thought if this is the way I have to go to school this is the way I'll just go. Adults weren't telling us about the politics behind it..... so we were just like "why is everyone fighting?" And that was probably before they threw the blast bomb in and after that, then after that

(pause) "oh maybe it is us.'" (Int 2:F).

The following quote is demonstrative of the detrimental effect of the dispute itself, compounded by the subsequent lack of dialogue within families:

'I was in denial for ages, all the way through Holy Cross, all the way through secondary school, like I talked about it as if it was nothing to me. It wasn't until I moved away to university, I had a breakdown and I was diagnosed with PTSD because of Holy Cross' (Int 2:F).

The act of reinforcing boundaries, through continued reminders of 'don't be going up that road now' from Int:4's family, coupled with the silences or lack of explanation of the dispute helped to create an unknown form, or 'other' beyond their safe space. Reinforcing within these young girls an 'us and them' mindset, continuing for the 'ceasefire generation' sectarian divisions which have existed in some form since the Ulster Plantation but amplified throughout the Troubles.

Reflecting on Halbwachs (1992) concepts of the collective (or social) character of memory; I want to focus on how our experiences of the present world connect us to the past, and that the past influences the present. Building on this, Connerton (1989, 2009) argues that the collective memory of a society gains legitimacy through two interlinking social activities; commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices. By using the Holy Cross 'dispute' as an example, the catalyst for which was raising a flag, but imbedded with deeper connotations drawn from the past and contentiousness of boundary clarification. The dispute highlights that post-conflict tensions remain bubbling beneath the surface in communities like Ardoyne and Glenbryn which are easily ignited. The summer of 2001 was particularly contentious, there were difficulties with the Power-Sharing Executive; and violence was at its highest levels in North Belfast for some time, with 1,700 incidents of sectarian disorder (Jarman 2005, 18). The Good Friday Agreement (GFA), gave the promise of hope or an enduring peace and shared future. Three years later the memory of the conflict remained alive, not only through the physical architecture of peace walls, or cultural artefacts of flags and murals, or the political system, but manifested in the day-to-day lives and embedded sectarianism illustrated by the Holy Cross dispute. Former chief constable Alan McQuillan said: 'I think Holy Cross did an immense amount of harm to the peace process. It was a catalyst that kept the violence going at interfaces across the north of the city for twelve months' (Cadwallader 2004, 310).

For those that I interviewed, the memory and legacy of trauma is ingrained in the geographical space and place of Ardoyne Road. The lasting memory associated with this space is one of conflict, territory, boundaries, sectarianism, and the horrors of the Holy Cross dispute. This evokes Doreen Massey's (1995, 188; 2005; 2013) concept of the 'envelope of space-time'; where memories in space and place are not static but fluid,



they exist for a moment until that space is re-purposed for a different memory. The Ardoyne Road is a space that continues to signify trauma and conflict. From the Troubles orientated memories of the older generations to the Holy Cross dispute memories of the 'ceasefire generation', both resonating connotations of sectarianism. This she argues is memory layering, for our case study, the act of memory layering is a solidification of sectarian divisions, moving away from active reconciliation.

### **Moving forward**

Perhaps surprisingly, the interviewees expressed optimism and an active feeling of hope for a new peaceful future. Brandon Hamber and Grainne Kelly (2004; 2016) define reconciliation as developing a shared vision, acknowledging and dealing with the past, building positive relationships, significant cultural and attitudinal change and substantial social, economic and political change. Many of those interviewed talked about the work of community groups and youth clubs in assisting the process of reconciliation. Some reflected on the various difficulties in setting up cross-community programmes that a lingering fear of the past presented, often informed by older generation's narrative of the conflict. One interviewee felt that young people should lead by example.

'They (younger people) are able to challenge older people's stereotypes. I think within the next two generations we will see dramatic changes here if young people can progress and if they are given a voice.' (Int 5:F)

Highlighting the extent of work being done by community groups such as the youth clubs in Ardoyne (the Ardoyne Youth Club, John Paul II Youth Club and the R City programme) she continued:

'It has literally brought two communities together, Hammer<sup>4</sup> and Ardoyne, the relationships and the comfortability young people from that youth club feel walking in here [Ardoyne], vice versa. You see them in town with each other, sectarian violence has kind of stopped between our two communities because of these relationships that are built, they're seeing them as people now, not the 'them and us' and I think if more groups and programmes were run like that we would break down those barriers and fears that people seem to have' (Int 5:F).

However, in order to achieve reconciliation as Hamber and Kelly (2004; 2016) suggest, there is a need for societal change, aimed at all levels of society. The small cohort of participants articulated a desire for change but questioned how this will be achieved by the older generation who suffered during the Troubles, or by those severely impacted by the trauma of intergenerational memory. Intergenerational trauma needs to be recognised and addressed in a systemic, fully resourced way at policy level and not

---

4. The Hammer is the name given to a small area in the unionist/loyalist Shankill Road, which has its own youth clubs.

consigned to local voluntary organisations to tackle.

## Conclusion

This article argues that memory and legacy are embedded within place and space. Legacy of the past can be found within the territorial understandings of space, memories, recollections of events, acts of violence and ongoing tension. The Holy Cross dispute for the ceasefire generation, represents their first tangible experience of the ongoing, if under-lying, enduring tensions. Memory for many in this generation is derived intergenerationally, from stories, photographs or indeed silences, and from physical representations including murals, flags and conflict architecture, such as peace walls or barricades. Other elements of intergenerational memory are intrinsic to understanding this concept but given the space restrictions, are outside the scope of this article. A fuller argument would include peace walls and the impact of conflict architecture, alongside commemorative events such as marches and parades, coupled with music and songs.

Evidenced in the cross-community work engaged in by youth groups, there is a promising reflection that reconciliation might be possible through youth-led community-based organisations. However, this requires full funding from governmental bodies. As found within the interviewees' optimism for cross-community developments and youth engagement in new public spaces of the North, we can see the pendulum of radical segregation begin to swing in the opposite direction.

## References

- Bar-Tal, Daniel. 2003. 'Collective Memory of Physical Violence: Its Contribution to the Culture of Violence.' In *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict*, edited by Ed Cairns and Mícheál D. Roe, 77–93. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Cadwallader, A. 2004. *Holy Cross: The Untold Story*. Belfast: Brehon Press.
- Cairns, Ed and Mícheál D. Roe, eds., 2003. *The Role of Memory in Ethnic Conflict*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Commission for Victims and Survivors. 2011. *Troubled Consequences: A Report on the Mental Health Impact of the Civil Conflict in Northern Ireland*
- Connerton, Paul. 1989. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Connerton, Paul. 2009. *How Modernity Forgets*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Connolly, Paul and Julie Healy. 2004. 'Children and the Conflict in Northern Ireland: The Experiences and Perspectives of 3–11 Year Olds.' Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, Research Branch.
- Connolly, Angela. 2011. 'Healing the wounds of our fathers: Intergenerational Trauma, Memory, Symbolization and Narrative.' *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 56: 607–626.
- Dawson, Graham. 2007. *Making Peace with the Past?: Memories, Trauma and the Irish Troubles*. Manchester University Press.
- Gilligan, Chris. 2009. *Vulnerability and the Protests at the Holy Cross Girls Primary School in Belfast; Community Citizenship and the 'War on Terror'*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Halbwachs, Maurice and Lewis A. Coser. 1992. *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hamber, Brandon and Grainne Kelly. 2005. A place for reconciliation? Conflict and locality in Northern Ireland.
- Hamber, Brandon and Grainne Kelly. 2016. 'Practice, Power and Inertia: Narrative, Archives and Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland.' *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 8: 25–44.
- Heatley, Colm. 2004. *Interface: Flashpoints in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Lagan Books. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/interface/docs/heatley04.htm#chap1>

## References

- Hirsch, Marianne. 2012. *The Generation of Post-memory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. Columbia University Press.
- Hoelscher, Steven and Derek H. Alderman. 2004. 'Memory and Place: Geographies of a Critical Relationship.' *Social and Cultural Geography* 5: 347–355.
- Jarman, N. 2005. 'No longer a problem? Sectarian violence in Northern Ireland.' Belfast, UK: Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland.
- Lawther, Cheryl. 2013. 'Denial, Silence and the Politics of the Past: Unpicking the Opposition to Truth Recovery in Northern Ireland.' *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 7:157–177.
- Leonard, Madeleine. 2008. 'Building, Bolstering and Bridging Boundaries: Teenagers' Negotiations of Interface Areas in Belfast.' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34: 471–489.
- Leonard, Madeleine. 2010. 'Parochial geographies: Growing up in divided Belfast.' *Childhood* 17: 329–342.
- Massey, Doreen. 1995. 'Places and Their Pasts.' *History Workshop Journal* 39: 185–192.
- Massey, Doreen. 2005. *For Space*. Sage Publications.
- Massey, Doreen. 2013. *Space, Place and Gender*. John Wiley and Sons.
- Never, Brent. 2010. 'Framing Third- Sector Contributions to Service Provision; The Case of the Holy Cross Dispute.' *Non-Profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 39 (June): 460–477
- Nora, Pierre. 1989. 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de mémoire.' *Representations* 26: 7–24.
- Nora, Pierre. 1996. *Realms of Memory: Conflicts and Divisions*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Shirlow, Peter. 2001. 'Fear and Ethnic Division.' *Peace Review* 13: 67–74.
- Shirlow, Peter and Brendan Murtagh. 2006. *Belfast: Violence, Segregation and the City*. Pluto Press.
- Thompson, Janna. 2009. 'Apology, Historical Obligations and the Ethics of Memory.' *Journal of Memory Studies* 2: 195–210.

# EMBEDDING MEMORY INTO THE LANDSCAPE — A PLACE FOR STOLPERSTEINE IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

Stephen Roulston & Sammy Taggart



# EMBEDDING MEMORY INTO THE LANDSCAPE – A PLACE FOR STOLPERSTEINE IN NORTHERN IRELAND?

## Abstract

In Germany initially, and now across those parts of Europe that had been under Nazi control, small brass plaques – stolpersteine – have been cemented in pavements by the artist Gunter Demnig. Each stolperstein gives brief details about a person who lived in the building outside of which it has been installed, the date on which they were forcibly evicted and, finally, it records their fate in the Holocaust. Installed in 'ordinary places' (Cook and van Reimsdijk 2014), they are installations which visitors come across, rather than visit. They act as powerful quotidian counter-memorials, the antithesis of state-sponsored memorials to those who have died in conflicts. While not without their critics, most local people seem to have embraced this form of remembrance. Northern Ireland's 'Troubles' had a much smaller death toll than the Holocaust, but counter-memorials have already been erected for some of the over 3,600 dead, with more being established each year. Far from contributing to understanding or reconciliation, the design and placement of some of these counter-memorials, especially in interface areas, may exacerbate division. In this paper we examine the potential to transpose the stolpersteine concept for those who died in the conflict in Northern Ireland, and the challenges and benefits that such a venture might generate.

KEYWORDS: *Northern Ireland, Troubles, memorialisation, stolpersteine, victims*

## Introduction

Originally in Germany, and now across 23 other European countries, small brass plaques have been placed in pavements by the artist Gunter Demnig (Cook 2012). The inscriptions simply record basic information about residents who lived in the nearby buildings who were forcibly removed from their dwellings and transported to camps such as Auschwitz. They include Jews, Sinti, Roma and other minority groups. These stolpersteine, literally and metaphorically 'stumbling blocks', have produced considerable academic literature (see Drozdowski 2018; Hanauer 2016). Installed as they are in 'ordinary places' (Cook and van Reimsdijk 2014), they are memorials which are often stumbled upon, rather than visited. The result is a cultural landscape which is powerful exactly because the markers are unimposing and unexpected. This short paper will examine the potential to use some similar form of distributed memorialisation in Northern Ireland (NI), a society emerging from conflict. It will also explore some of the challenges that such memorialisation might pose and the potential to overcome these.



## Background to the Troubles

Since its inception in 1921, Northern Ireland, politically part of the United Kingdom but geographically part of the island of Ireland, has been a divided society. These divisions emerge from 'opposing nationalisms' (Boal 2002, 688) with Irish/Nationalist/Republicans on one hand and British/Unionist/Loyalists on the other. This characterisation is often further condensed to the useful, if reductive, terms 'Catholic' and 'Protestant'. From 1968, a 30-year period of ethno-sectarian conflict caused the deaths of over 3,600 people, over half of whom were civilians (Worden and Smith 2017), with injuries to 30,000, many of which were life changing. In NI this period is euphemistically known as the 'Troubles'. While raw numbers are tiny compared to the Nazi Holocaust, scaled to the population of Great Britain, this is the equivalent of 126,000 dead and 1.8 million injured (Horgan 2006, 659). Its effect throughout this small society was and remains considerable.

## Official memorials

Northern Ireland's communities did not wait for anniversaries of fifty or more years (McAtackney 2015, 116), but moved quickly to commemorate the Troubles once they had largely finished. There are, however, no public memorials to some groups who died in the conflict. For instance, while the names of local security force personnel who died have been added to existing war memorials in some Protestant areas, this is neither consistent nor agreed across Northern Ireland. The only memorial which names the forces of the state who died is in Staffordshire in England, a location described as 'curiously contextless and placeless' (Graham and Whelan 2007, 491). The lack of 'official' memorialisation in NI itself may be due to the disputed role that the security forces played during the Troubles, particularly its implication in collusion with loyalist paramilitaries (McGovern 2015) and in 'shoot-to-kill' policies (Rolston 2005). As the state denies being an active participant in the conflict, commemoration of those of its forces who died may not be in its best interests and, in any case, it can be argued that 'the... state has abrogated its sovereign powers by declining responsibility for commemoration and for the past' (Graham and Whelan 2007, 479).

## Civilian dead memorials and counter-memorials

While remembrance of the state actors who died in the Troubles seems muted, neither has the British government erected a monument to the whole of the civilian dead, whether in NI or elsewhere. Only in the case of large-scale atrocities are official memorials erected in public spaces for non-combatants. One is the Omagh memorial erected to remember the thirty-one victims of a bombing in 1998. There are few of these types of memorials and, across NI, there is little to mark the death and destruction. In Belfast, for instance, central areas were regenerated and the area 'normalised' (O'Dowd and Komarova 2011). Memorials to some of the individuals who died exist, but they are:

‘... confined to the sectarianised neighbourhoods of the city’s periphery...the demarcated sanctuaries of republicanism and loyalism.’ (Robinson 2017, 120).

Foote’s (2003) continuum of memorialisation places occasions of historical violence into four categories: sanctification, designation, rectification and obliteration. Much of the public space in Northern Ireland would seem to reflect the rectification or, on occasion, obliteration of memory.

Government-initiated monuments erected after conflicts tend to be grandiose structures, often designed to legitimise the state and its actions, and to articulate a single truth which suits the official narrative (Dwyer and Alderman 2008, 168). Their antithesis, counter-memorials, are vernacular (Stangl 2008; Stevens et al. 2018). Fraser (2012) noted 600 of these commemorating some of those who died, erected in public spaces across Northern Ireland, with more added each year (Graham and Whelan 2007, 480). Seldom, if ever, are these sanctioned by the authorities, and ‘...unlike the monument, the counter-memorial is quotidian; it is part of everyday life’ (Rolston 2020). They take many forms across NI, most obviously as wall murals. From the beginning of the twentieth century, these were painted each year in Protestant areas, often depicting a Protestant king’s victory in a battle in 1690. During the Troubles, many murals took on a paramilitary nature often honouring a combatant who had been killed. While any opposition tends to be private and muted, these are not universally welcomed by local people, perceived by some as: ‘...acts of intimidation, offering warnings to stay out or beware of the force behind the image’ (McCormick and Jarman 2005, 50).

## Metaconflict

When violence concludes, communities can become disputatious about the conflict. The resulting ‘metaconflict’ (Bell et al. 2014; Mallinder 2019) impacts on commemoration. One issue is deciding who the victims are, and a hierarchy of perpetrators and victims is established (Fraser 2012, 47). The UK Government’s definition of a victim (or survivor) included: ‘someone who is or has been physically or psychologically injured as a result of or in consequence of a conflict-related incident...’ (UK Govt. 2006).

This definition was disputed by some politicians who felt that it did not distinguish between ‘innocent victims’ and paramilitary combatants who had been injured, whom they termed ‘terrorists’ (Dawson 2013, 267). A combatant may deserve the designation ‘victim’ but that seems to be dependent on whether the combatant was on ‘your’ side, or the ‘other’ side (Hancock 2012, 220).

Even memory is contested. There may be counterclaims as to whose memory gets acknowledged, and the gaps in memorialisation may be problematic for some individuals. In short, commemoration, whether through memorials or some other

outcome, can challenge communities emerging from a troubled past. As Brown and Grant (2016) note: '...the salience of collective memory ...is maintained even if a conflicted and divided society shifts into a peace process' (141).

Some memorials have created controversy despite being intended as reconciliatory. Robinson (2017, 145) describes the memorial to a bombing in a small village, erected almost thirty years after three car bombs killed nine people. It comprises a statue of a young girl and, while not intended by the artist to represent one of the victims, has divided some of the community by seeming to portray the suffering of just one individual. Perceived as being imposed on the community from without, its impact has contributed to '...the further sectionalisation of social memory' (2017, 151) in the village.

### Language and memorials

Alderman (2012) reflects that geographers consider the landscape as a form of language but notes that '...they have devoted limited attention to interpreting the actual words and phrases inscribed into landscapes of public commemoration' (358). He goes on to examine how state highway markers in North Carolina excluded African American experiences, something now being partially addressed. In the Northern Ireland setting, the language used in counter-memorials can also portray a partial view. Loyalist memorials often imitate the State's war memorials in terms of the language used while republican memorials '...are often standardized and inscribed with a ritual rhetoric of volunteers who died for Ireland and who were "murdered" or "executed" if they were killed by British special forces' (Graham and Whelan 2007, 484). Even small markers erected by family members sometimes use the word 'murdered' (Robinson 2017, 156).

Robinson notes that choices made in the language employed on memorials is often aimed at a wider narrative:

'An inscription is not just a written inscription, a message, mnemonic, or narrative, etched, soldered, attached in prose to a site or memory... an inscription is also an aesthetic choice, the larger process by which a social memory is emplaced into a landscape, and dependent on how it is situated with a larger viewing community' (Robinson 2017, 151).

While the language of official memorials can be criticised as contributing to forgetting and excluding marginalised and subaltern groups (Rolston 2020), counter-memorials too have been criticised for being partial, by ignoring the role of females (McDowell 2008) and by expropriating symbolism from other sources to support a particular narrative (Rolston 2010). They can also be criticised as '...not only failing to promote reconciliation, but ... acting as a catalyst to more violence' (Pinkerton 2012, 132).

### A place for stolpersteine?

With metaconflict, disputed memory and contentious memorialisation around Northern Ireland's Troubles, there may be little place for discrete stolpersteine installed close to the place of killings, many of which are not recorded in other ways. What seems clear, if other memorials are a guide, is that such installations might be open to many challenges. A closer look at stolpersteine, and their evolution might be useful to expose some of these before considering how they might be viewed in Northern Ireland.

Stolpersteine can be seen as archetypal counter-monuments, as:

'...the focus on death, forced displacement, and absence is uniquely anti-monumental. There is nothing celebratory in the stones, nor do they create a space to mourn or grieve. They simply note the absence of a body once present' (Bennie 2019, 32).

The text of each stolperstein is stark. Figure 1 reads 'Here lived Sophie Küchemann, Née Löwenstein, Year of birth: 1858, Deported 23.7.1942 to Theresienstadt (concentration camp and ghetto). Murdered 6.12.1942'. Demnig, the artist behind stolpersteine, himself says that 'the idea [is] that we have to restore their names. In the concentration camp they were numbers' (Cook and van Riemsdijk 2014).



*Figure 1: A stolperstein in Hannover (Tim Rademacher - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0)*

Demnig started to make and install stolpersteine in 1995 (Harjes 2005, 145). Initially at least, their installation was not sanctioned by the authorities. Indeed, at the beginning of the project, Demnig acted against the express desires of residents and local authorities (Apel 2014, 182) and the stones were installed 'illegally' (Cook 2012, 49). Some families criticised them as disrespectful, allowing people to walk on or over a relative's name on a pavement (Gould and Silverman 2013, 796).

Others worried that stolpersteine do not provide the context for the Holocaust as 'the stones themselves neither educate their audiences nor interpret the data they provide' (Harjes 2005, 148), and they hide more than they reveal (Apel 2014). There are instances where the Nazi perpetrators lived in the same residential neighbourhoods as the victims and, as members of the regime, rounded up those people now commemorated, and transported them almost invariably to their deaths. While this is also part of the Holocaust story, few clamour for memorials outside the perpetrators' residences. Nor do the memorials speak of those neighbours who gathered at the auctions of the contents of the emptied houses in search of a bargain. Indeed, there are concerns that: 'stolpersteine could in fact divert attention away from those who were responsible for, condoned or benefited from Nazi persecution' (Apel 2014, 190).

Despite a few objections some 70,000 stolpersteine have been installed so far in Germany, and 440 more are being produced every month (Demnig 2020). A small number have been defaced or attempts have been made to remove them by neo-Nazis (Cook and van Riemsdijk 2014, 142), but most are untouched and many have been 'adopted' and are cared for by local people (Gould and Silverman 2013). That there remains some dispute about erecting them is attested by the fact that the artist is sometimes accompanied by police when installing them (Cook 2012, 70). Nonetheless, there seems general agreement as to the desirability of memorialising these individuals and few dispute that the horror of the Holocaust should be remembered in this way.

What is less discussed are the categories of those who are memorialised in stolpersteine. An individual whose life was not considered exemplary may be judged by the artist to be unworthy of an installation. For some time the Nazi's own judgements seem to have been used to distinguish between deserving and undeserving victims of the Holocaust as, 'until recently, there were ... no Stolpersteine for those deemed asozial (anti-social) and arbeitsscheu (work shy) by the Nazis and imprisoned in concentration camps' (Apel 2014, 189). This uncomfortable policy has now changed but it appears that Demnig still retains the final say as to whether a stolperstein is installed or not. Apel points to a decision not to commemorate a deported victim who survived and went on to serve in the East German secret police – the Stazi. 'For Demnig, the life of a victim must be exemplary to warrant its memorialisation' (Apel. 2014, 189).

The dead of Northern Ireland's troubles includes local members of the security forces, members of the British army from outside NI and paramilitary combatants who died on 'active duty' on each side of the conflict. Some combatants were assassinated by paramilitaries from the 'other side' or targeted by forces within their own communities, in inter-paramilitary conflict or because they were believed to be informers. Many victims were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time and had no involvement in any organisation. Distinguishing the 'deserving' from the 'undeserving' victim is a difficult value judgement; deciding whether memorialisation is appropriate is equally challenging.



Colin Craig was killed along with two other members of the Ulster Volunteer Force, an illegal loyalist paramilitary organisation, in a drive-by shooting by republicans (Rolston 2020: Robinson 2017). Allegations later emerged that, at the time of the attack, Craig was being taken for interrogation as a suspected informer, which would have led to his almost certain execution. When this came to light, his name was removed from the mural commemorating the 'sacrifice ... for one's country' of the other two dead men (Robinson 2017, 159). Thomas Begley, a 23 year-old member of the Irish Republican Army, an illegal republican paramilitary organisation, is not commemorated in the memorial on the Protestant Shankill Road for the nine civilians killed alongside him when his bomb exploded prematurely (Rolston 2020).

It is relatively easy to see stolpersteine accepted by local people if they were to mark the place of death of an individual, particularly if (s)he were 'of' that community and if her/his death was caused by forces from outside that community – the 'other' community or the security forces – as that often fits the narrative of these counter-memorials. However, even if the person was a member of that community, were their life not seen as 'exemplary', if perceived to be an informer for example, then there is likely to be little support.

The category of victims to which it is easiest to ascribe the epithet of 'innocent' would be the 186 children who died in the Troubles (Duffy and McClements 2019). Michael McCartan was sixteen when he died in Belfast in 1980. His mother unveiled a plaque to him in 2019 (Figure 2). While painting a slogan on a wall, he was shot without warning by a plainclothes policeman. The plaque uses the more neutral 'shot' rather than 'murdered', but it is unequivocal in its final anguished statement that 'nobody was ever convicted of Michael's murder'. The houses behind which Michael was killed have



**Figure 2: Memorial on gable wall on Dromara Street, Ormeau Road, Belfast  
(Photograph: Stephen Roulston)**



been demolished and this gable is the closest surface on which to mount a memorial, but a stolperstein could be installed very close to where Michael died, on what is now a walkway along the River Lagan. Placed there with his family's permission, it would serve to 'ambush' the unwary, just as stolpersteine over Europe are doing, jolting people into thinking about the past and about a history which has forgotten many victims.

Harjes (2005, 149) is concerned that stolpersteine do not provide the full context for the Holocaust, accepting that supplementary material may help to fill those gaps. There is the potential here for a digital space to supplement any physical memorialisation with Quick Response (QR) Codes which link the viewer to more context about a particular stolperstein. QR codes might be more acceptable by being less overt in adding an additional layer of memory and are already widely used in cultural heritage tourism (see Solima and Izzo 2018). However, while overcoming the challenge of the description of the details of a person's death in a particular spot, it may merely move any contention online.

## Conclusion

Some fairly uncontroversial examples of individuals who may be suitable for memorialisation using stolpersteine can be found for all communities, perhaps the perceived 'innocent victims' discussed earlier. Evoking their memories by locating their names at the place where they met their deaths could bring social meaning to otherwise unremarkable locations. In consequence, this spatial palimpsest may change how such spaces are perceived by those who encounter them.

Those are relatively easy. Further along the continuum of victimhood it gets much more challenging. In Northern Ireland, there is no 'common vocabulary to describe those who died in the conflict' (Fraser 2012, 48), nor is there 'common ground on commemoration, apart perhaps, from the most poignant memorial of the Troubles: the book *Lost Lives* (McKittrick et al. 2001), which documents the circumstances of the deaths of all 3,665 victims' (Graham and Whelan 2007, 483). It is difficult to envisage a time when local people would accept the installation of a stolperstein for Thomas Begley or Colin Craig in the communities in which they met their deaths even though, in different circumstances, and from different perspectives, those young men too might be regarded as victims.

## Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank Dr Brian Lambkin for providing background for this paper and the useful comments of the two anonymous reviewers.

## References

- Alderman, D. H. 2012. 'History by the spoonful' in North Carolina: the textual politics of state highway historical markers. *Southeastern Geographe*, 52(4): 355–373.
- Apel, L. 2014. Stumbling blocks in Germany. *Rethinking History* 18(2): 181–194.
- Bell, C., C. Campbell and F. N. Aolain. 2004. Justice discourses in transition. *Social & Legal Studies* 13(3): 305–328.
- Bennie, N. 2019, *The Rhetoric of Counter-Monumentality: The Stolpersteine Project*. (Doctoral dissertation, Wake Forest University).
- Boal, F. 2002. Belfast: Walls within. *Political Geography* 21(5): 687–694.
- Brown, K. and A. Grant. 2016. 'A lens over conflicted memory: Surveying 'troubles' commemoration in Northern Ireland'. *Irish Political Studies* 31(1): 139–162.
- Cook, M. R. 2012. *Redefining Memorial Landscapes: the Stolpersteine Project in Berlin*. (MSc Thesis) Available from [https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_gradthes/1142/](https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes/1142/)
- Cook, M. and M. van Riemsdijk. 2014. 'Agents of memorialization: Gunter Demnig's Stolpersteine and the individual (re-) creation of a Holocaust landscape in Berlin'. *Journal of Historical Geography* 43: 138–147.
- Dawson, G. 2014. 'The desire for justice, psychic reparation and the politics of memory in "post-conflict" Northern Ireland. *Rethinking History* 18(2): 265–288.
- Demnig, G. 2020. *Stolperstein website* <http://www.stolpersteine.eu/en/home/>
- Drozdowski, D. 2018. 'Stolpersteine and memory in the streetscape'. In *After Heritage*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Duffy, J. and F. McClements, 2019. *Children of the Troubles: The Untold Story of the Children Killed in the Northern Ireland Conflict*. Hodder & Stoughton.
- Dwyer, O. J. and D. H. Alderman. 2008. 'Memorial landscapes: analytic questions and metaphors'. *GeoJournal* 73(3), 165–178.
- Foote, K. E. 2003. *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*. Austin, University of Texas Press.

## References

- Fraser, T. G. 2012. 'Historical legacies and the Northern Ireland peace process: Issues of commemoration and memorialisation'. *Shared Space* 12: 41–50.
- Gould, M. R. and R. E. Silverman, 2013. 'Stumbling upon history: collective memory and the urban landscape'. *GeoJournal* 78(5): 791–801.
- Graham, B. and Y. Whelan, 2007. 'The legacies of the dead: commemorating the Troubles in Northern Ireland'. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25(3): 476–495.
- Harjes, K. 2005. 'Stumbling stones: Holocaust memorials, national identity, and democratic inclusion in Berlin'. *German Politics and Society*, 23
- Hanauer, D. 2016. 'The Discursive Construction of the Stolpersteine Memorial Project: Official, Educational and Familial Meanings'. In *The Holocaust in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by D. M. Seymour and M. Camino, 277–290. Routledge.
- Hancock, L. 2012. 'Transitional Justice and the Consultative Group: Facing the Past or Forcing the Future?'. *Ethnopolitics* 11(2): 204–228.
- Harris, C. 2010. 'German memory of the Holocaust: The emergence of counter-memorials'. *Penn History Review* 17(2): 34–59.
- Horgan, G. 2006. 'Devolution, Direct Rule and Neo-Liberal Reconstruction in Northern Ireland'. *Critical Social Policy* 26(3): 656–668.
- McAtackney, L. 2015. 'Memorials and marching: archaeological insights into segregation in contemporary Northern Ireland'. *Historical Archaeology* 49(3): 110–125.
- McCormick, J. and N. Jarman. 2005. 'Death of a Mural'. *Journal of Material Culture* 10(1): 49–71.
- McDowell, S. 2008. 'Commemorating dead "men": Gendering the past and present in post-conflict Northern Ireland'. *Gender, Place and Culture* 15(4): 335–354.
- McGovern, M. 2015. 'State violence and the colonial roots of collusion in Northern Ireland'. *Race & Class* 57(2): 3–23.
- McKittrick, D., S. Kelters, B. Feeney, and C. Thornton. 2001. *Lost lives: The stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland troubles*. Random House.

## References

- Mallinder, L. 2019. 'Metaconflict and international human rights law in dealing with Northern Ireland's past'. *Cambridge International Law Journal* 8(1): 5–38
- O'Dowd, L. and M. Komarova. 2011. 'Contesting territorial fixity? A case study of regeneration in Belfast'. *Urban Studies* 48(10): 2013–2028.
- O'Leary, B. and McGarry, J. 2016. *The politics of antagonism: understanding Northern Ireland*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Pinkerton, P. 2012. 'Resisting memory: The politics of memorialisation in post-conflict Northern Ireland'. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relation* 14(1): 131–152.
- Robinson, J. 2017. *Transitional justice and the politics of inscription: Memory, space and narrative in Northern Ireland*. Routledge.
- Rolston, W. 2005. "'An effective mask for terror": Democracy, death squads and Northern Ireland'. *Crime, Law and Social Change* 44(2): 181–203.
- Rolston, W. 2020. 'Ambushed by Memory: Postconflict Popular Memorialization in Northern Ireland – A Right to Memory'. *International Journal of Transitional Justice* (In press).
- Solima, L. and F. Izzo. 2018. 'QR Codes in cultural heritage tourism: new communications technologies and future prospects in Naples and Warsaw'. *Journal of Heritage Touris*, 13(2): 115–127.
- Stevens, Q., T. A. Franck and R. Fazakerley. 2018. 'Counter-monuments: the anti-monumental and the dialogic'. *The Journal of Architecture* 23(5): 718–739.
- Stangl, P., 2008. 'The vernacular and the monumental: memory and landscape in post-war Berlin'. *GeoJournal* 73(3): 245–253.
- United Kingdom Government 2006. *The Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006*. Available from <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/2006/2953/contents>.
- Worden, E. A. and A. Smith, 2017. 'Teaching for democracy in the absence of transitional justice: The case of Northern Ireland'. *Comparative Education* 53(3): 379–395.

# FROM VIRTUAL PEACE WITH VIRTUAL REALITY: EXPLORING THE CONTESTED NARRATIVES OF SPACES AND PLACES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Sammy Taggart, Stephen Roulston, Clare McAuley



# FROM VIRTUAL PEACE WITH VIRTUAL REALITY: EXPLORING THE CONTESTED NARRATIVES OF SPACES AND PLACES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

## Abstract

While Northern Ireland (NI) is often viewed as a post-conflict society and hailed on the international stage as a success story for conflict resolution, it is fair to say that this is not the full story as in the near quarter of a century since the paramilitary ceasefires and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, a narrative of division remains where everyday life continues to be 'shaped by division along ethno-religious lines' (Blaylock, Hughes, Wolfer, and Donnelly 2018, 634).

Consequently, though generally regarded as being in a stage of conflict transformation and post-conflict reconstruction, NI remains deeply divided. Challenges remain in the 'betwixt and between' (Turner 1967) liminality that has been initiated by 'peace'. Moreover, many spaces and places in Northern Ireland remain contested, perceived to be 'no go areas' for 'the other' community and often divided into liminal spaces (Cunningham and Gregory 2014). Paradoxically open to international visitors 'fascinated by the possibility of 'reading the city' through mural paintings' (Kappler and McKane 2019, 1). This concept of liminality, further extended into literature around space and place in societies emerging from conflict (Murphy and McDowell 2019), is explored using Virtual Reality (VR) and reported within this paper.

Mirroring this virtual, 'neither here nor there', liminal characterisation of a community slowly emerging from conflict, this paper examines the use of VR as a pedagogical tool to share and explore narratives of contested spaces and places. Reporting on impact within teacher education, we examine the capacity for liminal, perspective-taking affordances of VR as a pedagogical tool, outlining how narratives of Northern Ireland's contested 'no go areas' might be interpreted and contribute to progressing a real and lasting peace.

**KEYWORDS:** *virtual reality, Initial Teacher Education, Northern Ireland, contested space, Bloody Sunday*

## Introduction

Northern Ireland's (NI) conflict is often characterised to be rooted in ethno-sectarian division, largely resulting from 'opposed nationalisms' (Boal 2002, 688) between the two main communities – the Catholic community and the Protestant community. The promotion of social cohesion and integration between the two communities has underpinned many government policies in 'peace' time (Knox 2011) for example, the



2005 A Shared Future strategy promoted “sharing over separation”, the 2013 Together Building a United Future strategy committed to building a “united and shared society” while the most recent offering, New Decade New Approach, looks to building “a shared and integrated society” (2020). Yet, in spite of this persistent policy focus, social cohesion remains elusive as NI society continues to be shaped by division including residential and educational segregation (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006) and an increased number of ‘peace walls’ (Jarman 2008). Clearly, irrespective of the passage of time, NI is struggling to live up to the accolade of a post-conflict society with significant challenges remaining in the liminal, threshold state that has been crafted in a fragile ‘peace’ (Jarman 2016). Ongoing community divisions affect the movements of people in Northern Ireland making it difficult for them to gain a fuller understanding of other communities. This paper describes an approach which offers such experience, which otherwise might be perceived as unsafe, using virtual reality.

### **Liminal spaces in NI**

Throughout the ‘Troubles’, space and geography were often used as territorial ‘markers’ for communities. Societal divisions endure, with some geographical spaces remaining ‘no-go areas’ for ‘the other’ community who can view them as ‘physical embodiments of fear, threat and conflict’ (Selim 2015, 17), frequently as a result of ‘competing and contested geographic claims of territory’ (Dempsey 2020, 7). Catholics and Protestants are often reluctant to enter ‘the other’ groups’ areas to meet, form friendship groups or to socialise and, as a consequence, interaction is often minimal (Roulston et al. 2017).

Education in NI is divided ‘along denominational lines’ (Loader and Hughes 2017, 117–118) – widely referred to as ‘Protestant’ schools and ‘Catholic’ schools. This structural division mirrors wider societal separation which persists beyond compulsory schooling into some third-level Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes in NI (Gardner 2016). Moreover, in a segregated society, travelling to school in some areas can engender risk. Young people can worry ‘...about real or perceived threat of violence triggered by school uniforms providing visual clues to ethno-sectarian affiliation’ (Roulston and Young 2013, 249). In short, school uniforms can distinguish and can allow others to make judgements of the ethno-sectarian affiliation of the wearer. This is likely to have had an impact on what out-of-school visits could be pursued with school groups in and around NI’s contested, liminal spaces.

A sense of ‘inbetweenness’ or liminality is not unfamiliar to communities in Northern Ireland. For example, attempts to create shared living spaces are challenging and policy in this area may even be counterproductive (Herrault and Murtagh 2019). Indeed, apart from in the centres of cities, it may not be possible to address the structural implacability of segregation (Komorova and O’Dowd 2016). Some have concerns that liminality, as a transition between conflict and peace, may become a permanent state. For instance, Murphy and McDowell, writing about Derry/Londonderry and Bilbao, note

communities with an ‘...understanding that underlying currents hold them in liminal space’(2019, 2511).

The concept of liminality has further resonance in the status of Preservice Teachers (PSTs) as they transition during Initial Teacher Education (ITE). ‘On the threshold of “teacherdom”’ (McNamara et al. 2002, 864) they occupy a liminal state; as they are ‘no longer just students nor are they fully teachers’ (Head 1992, 94), remaining ‘betwixt and between’. Exploring the concept of liminality through the lens of developing professional identity foregrounds the ‘inbetweenness’ of identity for PSTs. There are further concerns that teachers in NI are ‘culturally-encapsulated’ (Milliken et al. 2020) within their own communities. It is thus important that ITE programmes create safe spaces for PSTs to reflect how their experiences of living in a divided society have shaped their identity alongside developing the pedagogical tools to address division and difference. Many classrooms, however, continue to be sites of avoidance (Donnelly and Burns 2017) rather than spaces for critical engagement as teachers avoid teaching local conflict-related issues (Hanna 2019).

### **Virtual reality as a safe ‘way in’**

There is an accumulating body of evidence which suggests that virtual reality (VR) can provide that experiential learning and consequently help to develop empathy (Shin 2018; Walker and Wiedenbenner 2019). As VR can simulate a physical presence in real or imagined environments (Kerrebrock et al. 2017), through VR, the digital mimicry of sight, sound, and space, in addition to digital images and physical sensory presence, can act as a mediating in-between-space (Moujan 2011). VR has been termed the ‘ultimate empathy machine’ with the capacity to connect people; making them more compassionate, connected and empathetic (Milk 2015). Whilst some benefits attributed to VR might be ascribed to a ‘novelty effect’ (Lee and Wong 2014), much research positions VR tools as empathy gadgets (Jauhar 2017), empathy engines (Hiltner 2016) or more broadly as an empathy-enhancing technology (De la Peña et al. 2010; Oh et al. 2016). Hassan (2020) critically cites attempts to use VR to stimulate empathy with demonstrators in a political rally. Much of the criticism of empathetic affordances, however, is crystallised by Yang (n.d.), ‘If you won’t believe someone’s pain unless they wrap an expensive 360 video around you, then perhaps you don’t actually care about their pain’.

Despite criticism of the potential empathetic affordances of VR, it might, at least, support perspective-taking (De la Peña et al. 2010; Herrera et al. 2018) and reduce prejudice towards other groups (Ahn et al. 2013). It is in these latter capacities exploring the potential of VR as a pedagogical tool in conflict transformation, around which this study is situated. By creating a Situated Experiential Educational Environment (SEEE) (Schott and Marshall 2018), developers can use the richness of the VR learning tool as a safe ‘way in’ to explore contentious and sensitive contested spaces and events in

the past. VR can be used to ‘...let its users feel they are in and a part of the computer-generated virtual scenarios’ (Ip et al. 2018, 3 and ‘feel as if they are sharing the same physical space [...and...] influence how they think and behave’ (Bailey and Bailenson 2017, 109–110).

## Method

This exploratory study, situated in the contested space associated with Bloody Sunday<sup>1</sup>, involved twenty-one self-selecting PSTs completing a one-year post-primary Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) from a range of curriculum areas. The majority of participants represented History, Religious Education and Local and Global Citizenship – areas, where attending to difference and local conflict-related issues are prevalent. A mixed method approach (Creswell 2009) was employed to explore the opportunities and challenges associated with the use of VR in the context of contested space in NI.

A Virtual Reality SEEE was created around the contested sites<sup>2</sup> of the Bloody Sunday event in Derry<sup>3</sup>. The timeline of the events of Bloody Sunday as established by the Saville Inquiry (Saville et al. 2010) was used to inform the scene sequences. PST participants ( $n=21$ ) completed a pre-experience, biographical and attitudinal survey before exploring the SEEE (Taggart et al. 2019). Participants viewed the SEEE using low cost VR head-mounted displays (HMD) and personal mobile phones (Figures 1 and 2). Interaction with the resources took participants approximately twenty minutes and comprised six 360-degree scenes with digital overlays including archive media-reports, narration, ambient audio recordings, maps and images. Participants completed a post-experience survey and participated in a focus group immediately after engaging with the SEEE. The results presented and discussed within this short paper include participants’ attitudes towards the contested space from the pre and post surveys.

## Participants

The majority (57.1 percent) of participants identified as female, 42.9 percent as male. Most participants (61.9 percent) were within the 18–24 age category, while 28.6 percent

---

1. The Bloody Sunday event and associated geographical spaces were selected given its significance as a seminal event in recent NI history from a list of comparable historical sites/events identified for study by the local Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment Board (CCEA) History Specification for 14–16 year olds.

2. Almost fifty years on, these areas, abutting the ancient walled settlement of Derry/Londonderry, now the commercial core of the city, are largely Catholic in terms of residents and businesses and would contain few, if any residents, who would identify as Protestant.

3. The history and name of the city, including the site of Bloody Sunday, reflect the tensions between the two communities in Northern Ireland. The city was originally known as Derry which is still the name preferred by nationalists. The city was renamed Londonderry in recognition of the role played by the City of London in the settlement of Protestants from Scotland and England in the area in the 17th Century. Londonderry remains the official name of the city, despite numerous unsuccessful attempts to revert the name back to Derry.



**Figure 1** PSTs exploring SEEE using Head-Mounted Displays (HMD) and personal mobile devices.

were between 25–34 and the remainder (9.5 percent) over 35 years of age. 42.9 percent participants considered the area they grew up in to be mainly Catholic, 38.1 percent mainly Protestant and 19 percent, mixed. When asked how they would describe the school they attended for the majority of their schooling, 61.9 percent said predominately Catholic, 33.3 percent said predominantly Protestant and 4.8 percent as half Protestant and half Catholic. Reflecting the complex issue of identity across NI, the majority (47.6 percent) chose to describe themselves as Irish, 33.3 percent as Northern Irish, 14.3 percent British and 4.8 percent European.



**Figure 2** Two 2D images displayed simultaneously within the HMD appear to the user as a single 360 degree immersive image with overlays.

## Findings

PSTs were asked how comfortable they would be in visiting the sites associated with Bloody Sunday, both as an individual and also as a teacher with a group of school pupils, wearing school uniforms from a range of school types in NI.

### Pre-experience comfort levels in visiting this contested space

Prior to the VR experience, PSTs within this study overwhelmingly reported feeling 'comfortable' or 'very comfortable' about personally visiting locations historically linked with the activities on Bloody Sunday. Over three quarters (76.2 percent) of participants had personally visited the location(s) prior to engaging in the SEEE activity. Many, however, displayed a marked reticence to visit this contested space in a professional capacity as shown in Figure 3.

#### PSTs' comfort levels visiting Bloody Sunday locations personally or with groups in school uniform from various school types following VR SEEE.

	Very Comfortable	Fairly Comfortable	Neither Comfortable nor Uncomfortable	A bit Uncomfortable	Very Uncomfortable	I don't know
...visiting this area?	57.14	38.10	0.00	0.00	4.76	0.00
...bringing a group of pupils from a mostly protestant school in school uniform	19.05	33.33	0.00	42.86	4.76	0.00
...bringing a group of pupils from a mostly catholic school in school uniform	42.86	52.38	4.76	0.00	0.00	0.00
...bringing a group of pupils from an integrated school in school uniform	33.33	47.62	4.76	14.29	0.00	0.00
...bringing a group of pupils as part of a shared education event in school uniforms	33.33	42.86	9.52	14.29	0.00	0.00

Created with Datawrapper

**Figure 3 PSTs' comfort levels visiting Bloody Sunday locations personally or with groups in school**

Low levels of comfort are most pronounced when bringing a group of pupils from 'a mostly Protestant school' in their school uniform. Even those PSTs who identified as Catholic, lived within the city and who know the area well, reported being very uncomfortable in bringing pupils to this space wearing school uniforms. The perceived proxy of ethno-sectarian affiliations presented by pupils in school uniform (Roulston and Young 2013) is clearly contributing to PSTs' comfort levels in their considerations of educational visits to contested spaces. In this case, the majority (71.43 percent) of PSTs reported some degree of discomfort; feeling a bit uncomfortable (42.86 percent) or very uncomfortable (28.10 percent) at such a prospect. Generally, PSTs would feel most comfortable bringing pupils from a Catholic school to this area with only 4.76 percent feeling a bit uncomfortable. Bringing pupils from Integrated schools<sup>4</sup> and Shared Education<sup>5</sup> activities generates broadly comparable levels of comfort in PSTs, lower than that from segregated schools. Table 1 depicts variation in comfort levels based on where participants themselves grew up.

It shows that PSTs who grew up in a mixed area are least comfortable bringing groups of pupils from a Protestant school in uniform to the area. Interestingly, PSTs who themselves live in Catholic areas are less comfortable than their Protestant counterparts

4. Integrated schools bring children and staff from Catholic and Protestant traditions, as well as those of other beliefs, cultures and communities together in one school.

5. Shared Education is a funded school collaboration project involving Protestant, Catholic and Integrated schools working together.

when considering bringing any group other than from a Catholic school to this predominantly Catholic area. Those PSTs, however, who grew up in mainly Protestant areas reported concerns about a lack of preparedness on the part of their pupils and, for example, that inappropriate comments might be made by pupils in their school group that may cause offence or initiate violence.

**Table 1 PSTs' comfort levels, grouped by location where they grew up, about visiting Bloody Sunday locations personally or with groups in school uniform from various school types. . (1- Very uncomfortable to 5- Very comfortable)**

Would you describe the area you grew up in as...		...visiting this area?	...bringing a group of pupils from a mostly protestant school in school uniform	...bringing a group of pupils from a mostly catholic school in school uniform	...bringing a group of pupils from an integrated school in school uniform	...bringing a group of pupils as part of a shared education event in school uniforms
Mainly Catholic	Mean	4.6	2.4	4.3	3.7	3.7
	SD	0.7	1.2	0.5	1.1	1.1
Mainly Protestant	Mean	3.7	2.7	4.1	4.5	4.5
	SD	1.1	1.7	0.6	0.5	0.5
Mixed	Mean	3.7	1.5	3.5	2.5	2.5
	SD	0.5	0.6	1.0	1.3	1.3
Total	Mean	4.1	2.4	4.1	3.8	3.8
	SD	0.9	1.4	0.7	1.2	1.2

Moreover, open responses from participants highlight concerns that can be categorised around three interconnecting themes associated with visiting this contested space either personally or as a teacher with identifiable school groups. These were:

1. A perceived lack of readiness of the local community and/or pupils;
2. PSTs' and pupils' perception of the locality; and
3. concern for pupil wellbeing.

PSTs proffered a lack of readiness on the part of pupils or the local community as rationale for their reticence to visit this contested space. One participant, who lived in a predominately Protestant area and attended a largely Protestant school for most of his education, cited his concerns about a perceived level of general ignorance stating: 'the lack of understanding, knowledge, mindset or acceptance that some people still have' as a reason to support his discomfort in visiting the area personally or professionally – perhaps a victim of 'cultural encapsulation' (Milliken et al. 2020).

Another key emerging theme was that of perceptions held by PSTs regarding members



of the local, predominantly Catholic, community. One student, a resident of the city who had attended a Catholic school there, expressed concerns about visiting the area.

‘The people who live in this area would be seen as strongly republican. I would be worried about the students’ safety and also the strong possibility of people shouting sectarian abuse at them which even I have heard people do within these areas’. Another participant (Protestant) reported concerns of ‘conflict with extremists inhabiting the area’. Another PST hinted that his discomfort stemmed from a broader societal dogma citing:

‘...negative, past-driven stereotypes and stigmas attached to a Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist person(s) visiting a predominantly Catholic/Nationalist/Republican area alongside present issues associated with ongoing “troubles” related criminal activity that are still taking place today’.

The most prevalent theme was that of fear for pupils’ physical and emotional wellbeing reflecting Selim’s (2015) assertions of the threat and fear embodied in such contested space. One PST reported that she: ‘...would be concerned about the pupils feeling uncomfortable or targeted given the nature of the area.’

Another linked pupil readiness and concerns for wellbeing, cautioning of ‘possible trouble due to a stupid comment from a pupil’, suggesting that the readiness of the visiting group might also be a factor in perceived wellbeing.

### **Post-experience responses**

Immediately following immersion within the SEEE, the PSTs completed a post-experience survey. Figure 4 shows PSTs’ levels of comfort in visiting this part of Derry/Londonderry after the immersive experience. For all school-type scenarios, when comparing Figure 4 to Figure 3, the percentage of PSTs indicating that they would be very comfortable to visit or bring a group of students to this location increased.

An increased 19.05 percent of the sample reported they would be ‘very comfortable’ to visit the area personally or bring a group of pupils from a mostly Catholic school in their uniforms. Whilst less pronounced, comfort levels also increased for bringing pupils from Integrated schools (14.29 percent), mostly Protestant schools (9.52 percent) and through a Shared Education event (4.75 percent). The percentage of PSTs who reported that they would be ‘very uncomfortable’ bringing a group of pupils from a mostly Protestant school decreased by 23.81 percent.

Nearly half of participants agree (47.6 percent) that they understood more about the context of Bloody Sunday following this brief immersive experience which is consistent with findings from other research (Herrera et al. 2018; Ahn et al. 2013). A further 28.6

percent strongly agreed that their understanding has increased, while 9.6 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Approximately three-quarters of participants agreed (71.4 percent) or strongly agreed (4.8 percent) that they wanted to learn more about Bloody Sunday following this experience, with similar percentages indicating that they agree (57.1 percent) or strongly agree (23.8 percent) that they are more likely to want to visit the sites referenced within the experience in person.

#### PSTs' comfort levels visiting Bloody Sunday locations personally or with groups in school

	Very Comfortable	Fairly Comfortable	Neither Comfortable nor Uncomfortable	A bit Uncomfortable	Very Uncomfortable	I don't know
...visiting this area?	38.10	42.86	9.52	9.52	0.00	0.00
...bringing a group of pupils from a mostly protestant school in school uniform	9.52	19.05	0.00	42.86	28.57	0.00
...bringing a group of pupils from a mostly catholic school in school uniform	23.81	66.67	4.76	4.76	0.00	0.00
...bringing a group of pupils from an integrated school in school uniform	19.05	57.14	9.52	14.29	0.00	0.00
...bringing a group of pupils as part of a shared education event in school uniforms	28.57	42.86	9.52	14.29	4.76	0.00

Created with Datawrapper

**Figure 4 PSTs' comfort levels visiting Bloody Sunday locations personally or with groups in school uniform from various school types following VR SEEE.**

Participants reported a demythologisation of the contested space within this study. One PST reported 'You realise that the area as of today is not a scary place to bring students to'. A candid reflection points to the normalising affordances of VR.

'Despite the conflicted past of this area, it appears like a 'normal' city. Although there are remnants of past conflict, today I would feel safe in this area. I may still be slightly apprehensive about bringing a Protestant group in their uniforms'.

Normalisation, in the context of NI, was: '... (and still is) aimed at introducing degrees of normality to Northern Ireland through the removal of military structures and the re-integration of society' (Switzer and McDowell 2009, 341). Used as a tool to eradicate 'spaces of fear' (Shirlow 2003), PSTs, within this study, extend the applicability and benefits of this concept to include VR as a normalising tool.

Considerable research (see Ip et al. 2018; Bailey and Bailenson 2017) would suggest an emotional engagement effect associated with VR, and PSTs reported similar. When asked if the VR experience made them feel sad, 42.9 percent agreed and 14.3 percent strongly agreed. Similarly, 23.8 percent of respondents reported feeling angry by what they had experienced within the SEEE. The dominant emotive response reported was that of compassion where 14.3 percent strongly agree and 69 percent of participants

agreed that they felt compassion for the subjects portrayed within the VR experience. The value of the perspective-taking affordances of VR is perhaps most powerfully framed by one participant who reflected that 'coming from a nationalist background it made me think how others might feel going into the area and their apprehensions' which accords with the findings of De la Peña et al. (2010).

### Limitations

This study used a small sample of PSTs in a single Higher Education Institution in NI, limiting reliability in the extrapolation of some of the findings through statistical analysis. It is also recognised that the findings are based on a single, brief VR experience; limited to a single event in NI's history which, whilst it encapsulates much of which is at the core of NI's contested past, could be perceived to be more aligned to a single community's historical narrative. As such, further study and exploration of a broader range of contested spaces is considered advantageous.

### Conclusions

Findings from this study show that 'the legacies of the conflict impact upon people's (im) mobility' (Kappler and McKane 2019, 5). This extends to PSTs and, if left unchallenged, to the opportunities afforded to their pupils. Barriers to entering into liminal contested spaces endure, engineered by the 'Troubles'; galvanised by nearly a half century of division; and accessible only now, to some degree, through peace. For PSTs, these barriers include a perceived lack of community and/or pupil readiness, their own or pupil perceptions of the locality and, concern for pupil wellbeing.

ICT and digital technologies can generate spatial experiences that are real enough to be pedagogically important (Fenwick et al. 2011). The data presented above attest to the potential for brief, immersive VR experiences to be sufficiently affective as to generate emotive responses and ameliorate some degree of concerns across an ethno-sectarian divide in Northern Ireland.

Whilst this exploratory study was modest in scale, there is evidence that it had an impact on making 'real' the space where such an iconic event took place. The 'reality' for some participants, from both the Protestant and Catholic communities, was an emotional experience but there was also the feeling, predominantly amongst those who grew up in Protestant areas, that it countered the mythologised narratives and perceptions associated with this 'locus of memory' (Hebbert 2005); serving to make the extraordinary, ordinary - in fact, 'normal', and in turn, helping participants to counter the partisan versions of the past.

The possibilities for development of VR applications are considerable, with potential to be powerfully transformative. In the Northern Ireland context, there are possibilities in having communities virtually explore each other's spaces, helping to demystify

them and establish them as 'safe'. This could encourage real movement and in-spirit community conversations, helping to address any permanence in liminality. While its use might be clearest in post- conflict situations, it is not restricted to those. More widely, a post-COVID-19 world may limit travel for groups for some time, and international travel for school groups may be even more restricted. This technology could allow educators to immerse learners in segregated southern states of the USA or to explore the partitioning of the island of Ireland and the establishment of two parliaments in 1921/22 as part of the Decade of Centenaries. Socially, VR's capacity to provide a safe 'way in'; raise awareness; enhance understanding; develop empathy; and share and challenge narratives of political and community memory that have become embedded in liminal 'spaces of fear', is worthy of further inquiry.

## References

- Ahn, S.J., A.M.T, Lee and J. Bailenson. 2013. 'The effect of embodied experiences on self-other merging, attitude, and helping behavior.' *Media Psychology* Jan 1;16(1): 7–38.
- Bailey, J., and J. Bailenson. 2017. 'Considering virtual reality in children's lives.' *Journal of Children and Media* 11(1): 107–113.
- Blaylock, D., J. Hughes, R. Wolfer and C. Donnelly. 2018. 'Integrating Northern Ireland: Cross-group friendships in integrated and mixed schools.' *British Educational Research Journal* 44(4): 643–662.
- Boal, F. 2002. 'Belfast: Walls Within.' *Political Geography* 21(5): 687–694.
- Clayton, P. 1998. 'Religion, ethnicity and colonialism as explanations of the Northern Ireland conflict.' In *Rethinking Northern Ireland: Culture, Ideology and Colonialism*, edited by D. Miller, 40–54. London: Longman.
- Creswell, J. W. 2009. *Mixed methods procedures. Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications.
- Cunningham, N. and I. Gregory. 2014. 'Hard to miss, easy to blame? Peace lines, interfaces and political deaths in Belfast during the Troubles.' *Political Geography* 40: 64–78.
- De la Peña, N., P. Weil, J. Llobera, E. Giannopoulos, A. Pomés, B. Spanlang, and M. Slater. 2010. 'Immersive journalism: Immersive virtual reality for the first-person experience of news.' *Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments* 19(4): 291–301.
- Dempsey, K. 2020. 'Fostering Grassroots Civic Nationalism in an Ethno-nationally Divided Community in Northern Ireland.' *Geopolitics*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2020.1727449>
- Donnelly, C., and S. Burns. 2017. 'Teaching Citizenship in the Faith School: Qualitative Evidence from Separate Schools in Northern Ireland.' *Irish Educational Studies* 36(4): 471–487.
- Fenwick, T., R. Edwards, and P. Sawchuk. 2011. *Emerging approaches to educational research: Tracing the socio-material*. London: Routledge.
- Gardner, J. 2016. 'Education in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement: Kabuki theatre meets *danse macabre*.' *Oxford Review of Education* 42(3): 346–361.

## References

Governments of the UK and Ireland. 2020. The New Decade, New Approach Deal. London: UK Government.

Hassan, R. 2020. 'Digitality, Virtual Reality and The "Empathy Machine."' *Digital Journalism*, 8(2): 195–212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1517604>

Hamber, B. and G. Kelly. 2018. 'Response on Reconciliation to the Consultation Paper: Addressing the Legacy of Northern Ireland's Past.' INCORE, University of Ulster. Accessed online 5 October 2018.

Hanna, H. 2019. *Young People's Rights in the Citizenship Education Classroom*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Head, F. A. 1992. 'Student Teaching as Initiation into the Teaching Profession.' *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 23(2): 89–107.

Hebbert, M. 2005. 'The Street as a Locus of Memory.' *Environment and Planning* 23: 581–96.

Herrault, H. and B. Murtagh, 2019. 'Shared space in post-conflict Belfast.' *Space and Polity* 23(3): 251–264.

Herrera, F., J. Bailenson, E. Weisz, E. Ogle, and J. Zaki. 2018. 'Building long-term empathy: A large-scale comparison of traditional and virtual reality perspective-taking.' *PLoS ONE* 13(10): e0204494. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0204494>

Hiltner, S. 2016. 'Bear traps and empathy engines: Virtual reality at The New York Times.' *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/24/insider/events/virtual-reality-at-the-new-york-times.html>.

Ip, H.H., S. W. Wong, D. F. Chan, J. Byrne, C. Li, V. S. Yuan, K. S. Lau and J. Y. Wong. 2018. 'Enhance emotional and social adaptation skills for children with autism spectrum disorder: A virtual reality enabled approach.' *Computers & Education* 117: 1–15.

Jarman, N. 2008. 'Interface and security barrier mapping project.' Institute for Conflict Research, Belfast <http://www.belfastinterfaceproject.org/publications>

Jarman, N. 2016. 'The Challenge of Peace Building and Conflict Transformation: A Case Study of Northern Ireland.' *Kyiv-Law and Politics Journal* 2: 129–146.

Jauhar, S. 2017. 'Empathy gadgets. The New York Times.' Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/29/opinion/sunday/empathy-gadgets.html>.



## References

- Kappler, S., and A. McKane. 2019. "'Post-conflict Curating': The Arts and Politics of Belfast's Peace Walls." *de arte* 54(3) <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043389.2019.1613747>
- Kerrebrock, H., M. Brengman, and K. Willems. 2017. 'Escaping the crowd: An experimental study on the impact of a Virtual Reality experience in a shopping mall.' *Computers in Human Behavior*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.07.019>
- Knox, C. 2011. 'Peace Building in Northern Ireland: A Role for Civil Society'. *Social Policy and Society*, 10(1): 13–28. doi:10.1017/S1474746410000357
- Komarova, M. and L. O'Dowd. 2016. 'Belfast, "'The shared city"'? Spatial narratives of conflict transformation'. In *Spatializing Peace and Conflict*, 265–285. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lee, E.A., and K. W. Wong. 2014. 'Learning with desktop virtual reality: Low spatial ability learners are more positively affected.' *Computers and Education* 79: 49–58.
- Loader, R., and J. Hughes. 2017. 'Joining together or pushing apart? Building relationship and exploring difference through shared education in Northern Ireland.' *Cambridge Journal of Education* 47(1): 117–134.
- McNamara, O., L. Roberts, T. Basit, and T. Brown. 2002. 'Rites of Passage in Initial Teacher Training: Ritual, Performance, Ordeal, and Numeracy Skills Test.' *British Educational Research Journal* 28(6): 863–878.
- Milk, C. 2015. *How Virtual Reality can Create the Ultimate Empathy Machine*. TED Presentation, March. [https://www.ted.com/talks/chris\\_milk\\_how\\_virtual\\_reality\\_can\\_create\\_the\\_ultimate\\_empathy\\_machine](https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_milk_how_virtual_reality_can_create_the_ultimate_empathy_machine).
- Milliken, M., J. Bates and A. Smith. 2020. 'Education policies and teacher deployment in Northern Ireland: Ethnic separation, cultural encapsulation and community cross-over.' *British Journal of Educational Studies* 68(2): 139–160.
- Moujan, C. 2011. 'Learning from Baroque.' In *Metaplasticity in Virtual Worlds: Aesthetics and Semantic Concepts* edited by G. Mura, 167–181. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Murphy, J., and S. McDowell. 2019. Transitional optics: Exploring liminal spaces after conflict. *Urban Studies* 56(12): 2499–2514. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098018788988>
- Northern Ireland Executive. 2013. Together building a united community. Belfast: *Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister*.

## References

- Oh, S. Y., J. Bailenson, E. Weisz, and J. Zaki. 2016. 'Virtually old: Embodied perspective taking and the reduction of ageism under threat.' *Computers in Human Behavior* 60: 398–410.
- Roulston, S., U. Hansson, S. Cook, and P. McKenzie. 2017. 'If you are not one of them you feel out of place: Understanding divisions in a Northern Irish town.' *Children's Geographies* 15(4): 452–465.
- Roulston, S., and O. Young. 2013. 'GPS tracking of some Northern Ireland students – patterns of shared and separated space: divided we stand?.' *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education* 22(3): 241–258.
- Saville, L., W. Hoyt and J. Toohey. 2010. Report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry: Volume 1. London: HMSO.
- Schott, C. and S. Marshall. 2018. 'Virtual reality and situated experiential education: A conceptualization and exploratory trial.' *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* 34: 843–852.
- Selim, G. 2015. 'The Landscape of Differences: Contact and Segregation in Everyday Encounters.' *Cities* 46: 16–25.
- Shin, D. 2018. 'Empathy and embodied experience in virtual environment: To what extent can virtual reality stimulate empathy and embodied experience?.' *Computers in Human Behavior* 78: 64–73.
- Shirlow, P. 2003. "'Who fears to speak": Fear, mobility, and ethno sectarianism in the two 'ardoyne's.'" *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 3(1): 76–91.
- Shirlow, P., and B. Murtagh. 2006. *Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City*. London: Pluto Press.
- Switzer, C., and S. McDowell. 2009. 'Redrawing cognitive maps of conflict: Lost spaces and forgetting in the centre of Belfast.' *Memory Studies* 2: 337–353.
- Taggart, S., S. Roulston and C. McAuley. 2019. 'Bloody Sunday Situated Experiential Educational Environment.' Available at <https://www.thinglink.com/mediacard/1277258278773981186>
- Turner, V. W. 1967. 'Betwixt and between: The liminal period in Rites de passage.' In *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*, edited by V. Turner, 93–111. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP.

## References

UK and Irish Governments. 2020. The New Decade, New Approach Deal. London: UK Government.

Walker, G., and J. V. Weidenbenner. 2019. 'Social and Emotional Learning in the age of virtual play: technology, empathy, and learning.' *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning* 12(2): 116–132.

Yang, R. (n.d). 'If you walk in someone else's shoes, then you've taken their shoes': empathy machines as appropriation machines. NGV Triennial Voices. [https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition\\_post/if-you-walk-in-someone-elses-shoes-then-youve-taken-their-shoes-empathy-machines-as-appropriation-machines/](https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition_post/if-you-walk-in-someone-elses-shoes-then-youve-taken-their-shoes-empathy-machines-as-appropriation-machines/)

# **'BUILDING' AND 'CULTIVATING' PEACE: PRACTITIONER REFLECTIONS ON THE SUSTAINABLE PEACE NETWORK PROJECT**

**Wilhelm Verwoerd**



# 'BUILDING' AND 'CULTIVATING' PEACE: PRACTITIONER REFLECTIONS ON THE SUSTAINABLE PEACE NETWORK PROJECT

## Abstract

In this article the author reflects on an unexpected, far-reaching shift in language that emerged while he worked as the joint coordinator of the Glencree Survivors' and Former Combatants' programme (2002–2008). This programme increasingly included nature-based activities in the Wicklow Hills, the Scottish Highlands and the Imfolozi Wilderness in South Africa as part of what became known as the 'Sustainable Peace Network' (SPN; involving former combatants, survivors, and members of wider society from all sides of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland). In the process the dominant metaphor of peace 'building' began to resonate less with actual practice than more organic metaphors such as 'cultivating' or 'growing' peace. This article makes some sense of this lived experience by highlighting the metaphorical nature of peace language in general, as well as the strengths and limitations of the particular metaphors of 'building' and 'cultivation'. This practitioner challenge to the dominance of 'peacebuilding' language amounts to an argument for the use of multiple metaphors, for an enriched language of reconciliation, especially when it comes to relational peace practice. The shift from 'building' to 'cultivation' language within the SPN furthermore points to a growing awareness of the need to articulate a more sustainable and inclusive vision for peace and reconciliation practice.

**KEYWORDS:** *peacebuilding, peace cultivation, peace language, peace practice metaphors, sustainable peace*

## Building peace?

The first cringe took me by surprise. For years I was comfortable describing the dialogue work my colleagues and I were doing at the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation as 'peacebuilding'. I easily identified with the Glencree mission statement at that time: *'Committed to peacebuilding within and between communities'*.<sup>1</sup> After all, this was the way most people working for peace on the island of Ireland and beyond were talking and writing (for example Lederach 1998). I was aware that 'peacebuilding' was the internationally accepted, UN-sponsored, shorthand to describe a whole range of state and civil society activities to transform and consolidate institutions and relationships after/in addition to 'peace making' (including ceasefires, peace agreements and political settlements) and 'peace keeping' (including the presence of military force

---

1. See [www.glencree.ie](http://www.glencree.ie)

to back up fragile settlements, to keep recently warring factions apart).<sup>2</sup> Then, one day, out of the blue, I found myself struggling to use the word 'building' to describe my work as a joint programme co-ordinator of the Glencree Survivors' and Former Combatants' Programme. At the same time it started to grate when I heard others, locally and abroad, talk about peace 'building'. An often painful gap started to open up between, on the one hand, some of the connotations surrounding the word 'building' (precise control by builder, clear plans, working with inanimate objects), and, on the other hand, the messy, unpredictable, humbling realities of facilitating dialogue and enduring relationships between human beings affected by and involved in the armed aspects of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. Thus the search began for terms that resonated better with my peace practice at that time.

In this article I reflect on this search by highlighting the metaphorical nature of peace language in general as well as the strengths and limitations of the particular metaphors of 'building' and 'cultivation'. I also point to the far-reaching connection between the metaphor of 'cultivation' and a more integrated vision of deeply 'rooted' peace than typically suggested by the language of peacebuilding.

### **'Peacebuilding' as a metaphor**

There is indeed an obvious, literal sense in which the word 'building' can be used in connection with peace – providing a *literal description* of the physical, structural, visible aspects of post-war reconstruction such as rebuilding damaged houses, destroyed roads, broken bridges; restoring the shattered physical infrastructure of basic public services. But the expression 'peacebuilding' is often also used to bring to the fore the less visible, but no less important, challenges of '(re)building' the broken lives of individuals and the damaged relationships within and between families, communities, nations (Fisher 2005).

As we move from physical to psychological and social 'reconstruction' the word 'building' is clearly no longer used as a *literal description*. We have entered, instead, the realm of *metaphor* – an imaginative form of *comparison* in which one thing or reality stands in for another in order to bring greater understanding. A crucial, easily forgotten point about metaphors is that they do not suggest or pretend to offer a *perfect match* between the realities being compared (Zehr 2005, 52–60). However, repeated and widespread use of the expression 'peacebuilding' seemed to have 'plastered over' the metaphoric gap between 'peace' and 'building'. Typically we no longer blink an eye when seeing the expression peacebuilding.

---

2. See <http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding>. The UN Peacebuilding Commission, established in 2005, 'focuses on reconstruction, institution-building and sustainable development in countries emerging from conflict', through 'integrated strategies' it 'helps to close the gap between immediate post-conflict efforts, on the one hand, and long-term recovery and development efforts on the other'. Ramsbotham et al. (2005, 30) define these terms as follows: 'We use peacemaking in the sense of moving towards settlement of armed conflict, where conflict parties are induced to reach agreement voluntarily; Peacekeeping (traditionally with the consent of the conflict parties) refers to the interposition of international armed forces to separate the armed forces of belligerents, often now associated with civil tasks such as monitoring and policing and supporting humanitarian intervention; Peacebuilding underpins the work of peacemaking and peacekeeping by addressing structural issues and the long-term relationships between conflictants'.



Still, the widespread and continuing use of the building metaphor for peace suggests that, despite the risk of being blunted by overuse, this comparison remains a window on the complex dynamics of peace; 'construction' still provides a handy verbal tool to get a grip on the often intangible workings of peace. The comparison of peace with 'building' continues to stress that before and after violent political conflict, peace treaties and peacekeeping are not enough to ensure durable peace. In fact, according to Ramsbotham and colleagues (2005, 186), 'John Galtung invented the term 'peacebuilding' and meant it to characterise progression towards positive peace following the ending of war'. Nevertheless, 'building' peace remains a metaphor and *therefore not a full description*.

Remembering the metaphoric gap between 'peace' and 'building' is made more difficult by the tendency for a metaphoric comparison to be *less explicit* than its family members - analogies, similes or symbols. For example, it is easier to remember the limits of our language for peace when reading an unfamiliar, explicit comparison: 'The movement for a culture of peace is *like a great river, fed from diverse streams* – from every tradition, culture, language, religion, and political perspective...' (Fisher 2005, 138–9; emphasis added).

The above discussion helps to explain why I felt relief upon remembering that the expression 'peacebuilding' is also a metaphor; why this remembering brought encouragement in the search for words that better suit my peace practice at Glencree in the mid-2000s. Despite the dominance of the language of peacebuilding, there is more to peace than 'building'. In this regard Zehr helpfully points out the general need for ongoing vigilance in the use of metaphors: '[W]hile metaphors are very helpful in highlighting certain characteristics, they can also hide other characteristics. That is, they may be misleading because the 'match' between the two realities is never exact' (2005, 53–54).

### **'Cultivating' peace**

Looking back at my experience as a peace practitioner at Glencree it is actually not surprising that cringing and grating came to be associated for me with the word peacebuilding. Discomfort with what I experienced as misleading 'building' language broke through the surface after a period in which the peace work that I was involved in organically and increasingly began to incorporate nature-based activities via the emerging 'Sustainable Peace Network'.<sup>3</sup> Gradually metaphors such as 'growing', 'nurturing' and 'cultivating' started to fit better than 'building'.

---

3. Between 2004 and 2011, more than a 100 people from diverse survivor, former combatant and wider society backgrounds, linked to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland, participated in the Sustainable Peace Network (SPN) project. This project emerged from the Glencree Survivors' and Former Combatants' Programme, was co-facilitated by Brandon Hamber and Alistair Little and increasingly revolved around a 'Journey through Conflict' process developed by Alistair Little and Wilhelm Verwoerd (Little and Verwoerd 2013). The Journey through Conflict process involved SPN participants in annual cycles of storytelling, dialogue and relationship cultivation workshops. A key strand of this process was nature-based activities and journeys into the Wicklow Hills, the Scottish Highlands and the Imfolozi Wilderness in South Africa (Hamber, Little and Verwoerd 2017).

Some of the characteristics of peace work that in my experience tend to be painted over by the dominant 'building' metaphor and/or which are highlighted by 'growing' or 'cultivating' metaphors include the following:

'culture of peace' and 'peacebuilding from below'. It was music to my ears to read, for example, this statement by a village elder from Mozambique: 'You can bring us the culture of war in a plane and humanitarian aid in a truck, but you can't bring us the culture of peace, because it is a tree with its roots deep in our land'(quoted in

Cultivating Peace	Building Peace
<p>Role of grower/gardener/cultivator: Assist and support a natural process – water, good soil, sunlight needed, but the rest happens to a large degree 'by itself'</p> <p><i>Invitation to humility</i></p>	<p>Role of builder: Builder takes centre stage – without builder nothing will happen</p> <p><i>Temptation to be 'in control', to impose from above</i></p>
<p>Planning: Good gardening principles, even detailed landscape design, but not a fixed plan with standard measurements; plan remains adjustable, depending on weather, season, soil conditions</p> <p><i>Encourages flexibility</i></p>	<p>Planning: Detailed plans; predictability and precision required; same plan can be used in different contexts, repeatedly</p>
<p>Working with: Plants, soil, water, sunlight</p> <p><i>Requires reverence for mystery, tenderness of life and growth, encourages a sense of wonder</i></p>	<p>Working with: Building material – bricks, mortar, steel, wood – hard, dead objects, cut and shaped according to plan</p>
<p>Growing: Roots below the surface, in the dark; in different, opposing directions – deeper into the soil and towards the sun</p> <p><i>Invites holding of tensions and embracing of contradictions</i></p>	<p>Building: Foundations needed and fundamental to process, but once completed building takes place mostly above ground (including maintenance); requiring bright light; building from bottom upwards in one direction</p>
<p>Time: Growth can be encouraged, but normally dependent on season, weather etc. - takes its own time</p> <p><i>Stresses need for patience</i></p>	<p>Time: Building can be sped up – working "overtime", nighttime lights, more contractors etc; quick progress is possible; largely within human control</p>

Cultivating Peace	Building Peace
<p>Process: Cyclical, seasonal; from 3-dimensional point of view: spiral of returning again and again to same place, but at a different stage of growth</p> <p><i>Transforming legacy of violent conflict involves ongoing processes of reconciliation; forgiveness is not a once-off 'letting go'</i></p>	<p>Process:</p> <p><i>Linear, mechanical process – brick by brick, one after/ upon the other; clear starting and completion times (though ongoing need for maintenance)</i></p>
<p>Links with natural world: Vulnerable to weather, connected to and dependent on natural environment</p> <p><i>Encourages sense of connectedness, awareness of being part of fragile 'web of life'; ecological, holistic peace</i></p>	<p>Links with natural world: (Most) buildings provide protection against elements, but typically waste energy, not in tune with landscape</p> <p><i>Encourages sense of 'apartheid' from natural world; limited peace</i></p>

Fisher, 138). And to see that a 'culture of peace' can be defined as consisting of 'values, attitudes, behaviours and ways of life based on non-violence and based on respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of every person. In a culture of peace, power grows not from the barrel of a gun but from participation, dialogue and cooperation' (Fisher, 2005, 137; emphasis added).

Similarly, as pointed out by Ramsbotham et al., the emergence of the 'peacebuilding from below' model is rooted in practitioner experience: it 'came during the course of experience gained in supporting local groups trying to preserve or *cultivate* cultures of peace in areas of armed conflict in the 1990s'. While leaving room for international intervention (at earlier stages) in war-shattered states such as Kosovo, Bosnia, Afghanistan, in the peacebuilding from below model ... 'futures are negotiated, *cultivated* and legitimized through elective programmes of peace education and conflict resolution training, rather than prescribed and imposed by 'international bureaucracies'. In this model the vital role of '*grassroots*' organisations are treasured; culture is interpreted as a 'seedbed'; there is a recognition that 'long-term strategy will be sustainable if outsiders/experts 'support and nurture' rather than displace [local] resources' (2005, 217, 226, 220; emphases added).

This model of peacebuilding from below is clearly more compatible with the language of cultivation. However, unless the qualification 'from below' shines brightly, the

language of peacebuilding remains clouded by criticism such as this: 'peacebuilding is in effect an enormous experiment in 'social engineering – an experiment that involves transplanting western models of social, political, and economic organization into war-shattered states in order to control civil conflict... '(Ramsbotham et al 2005, 209). This kind of criticism and my earlier stress on the shadow side of the 'building' metaphor point to the need for multiple metaphors to convey the complexity of peace work.

### Need for multiple metaphors

Since 'building' appears to be the dominant metaphor in peace circles, my emphasis has been on the limits of this metaphoric comparison. By bringing these (often hidden, forgotten, unavoidable) limits to the fore my intention is to create more 'room' for other metaphors, and in particular to create more 'breathing space' for nature-based metaphors.

While I remain uncomfortable with the metaphor of 'building' I accept that this discomfort grows to a significant degree from the *type* of peace work with which I was involved at Glencree and within the SPN. This work can be seen to fall under the broad categories of 'conflict transformation' and 'trauma healing' (Schirch 2004, 46), with an emphasis on facilitating dialogue and productive relationships between people directly and indirectly involved in/affected by violent political conflict on the islands of Ireland and Great Britain.<sup>4</sup>

In reflecting on my discomfort with 'peacebuilding' language I also find it useful to draw attention to another set of important distinctions stressed by Lederach and Schirch, namely between personal, relational, cultural and structural *levels* of transformation (2004, 67–68). It would seem that the metaphor of 'building' peace is most suitable for types of peace work that operate more at the 'structural' level, involving institutional '(re)design', such as development, military conversion, transitional justice, governance and policymaking. Most of these are appropriately placed under a category named 'building capacity'. As we move closer to relational and personal levels of transformation, especially within trauma healing and conflict transformation types of peace work, it is arguably less appropriate to use the language of 'building' peace and more appropriate to use language of 'fostering', 'nurturing', 'growing', 'cultivating'.

When thinking about the language used to convey my role/identity/self-understanding

---

4. There is, of course, much more involved in peace work generally speaking (and within each of the categories mentioned above). Lisa Schirch's wide-ranging 'map of peacebuilding' includes 'waging conflict non-violently' through monitoring and advocacy, direct action, civilian-based defence; 'reducing direct violence' through humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping, military intervention, ceasefire agreements, peace zones, early warning programs; 'building capacity' through education and training, economic, social and political development, military conversion, research and evaluation; 'transforming relationships' through trauma healing, conflict transformation (through 'dialogue', 'principled negotiation', 'mediation', 'training'), restorative justice, transitional justice, governance, and policymaking (2004, 46–50).

as a peace worker, I therefore find it useful to imagine a spectrum of human agency: on the one end there is ‘growing’ (allowing for the most limited role for peace workers); on the other end one finds ‘engineering’ (giving the largest role to peace workers). Metaphors like ‘nurturing’, ‘healing’, ‘cultivating’, ‘weaving’ and ‘building from below’ would tend more towards the middle of the spectrum.

growing	healing	nurturing	cultivating	weaving	building from below	building	engineering
---------	---------	-----------	-------------	---------	---------------------	----------	-------------

Why was I drawn to the middle of the above-mentioned spectrum; why did I typically refer to the work I was involved in as peace ‘cultivation’? Often the metaphor of ‘growing’ did not fit that well, even within the SPN, because this metaphor leaves too much to ‘natural’ processes, with not enough room suggested for careful, ongoing, strategic planning. On the other hand, I remained concerned about the pitfalls of too much control, of arrogance and disconnection surrounding ‘building’ language, highlighted by previous references to peacebuilding as ‘social engineering’.

**Practicing the Art of Appropriateness**

Another important and ‘foundational’ guideline for the use of metaphors for peace practice can be found in that initial, unexpected cringe upon using and hearing the word ‘*peacebuilding*’. For this was a response rooted in one individual’s professional experience, at a particular time and stage within a specific project, with a particular purpose in mind, within a specific web of relationships and previous experiences. These embodied specificities point to the underlying art of appropriateness that is required in peace practice.

The art of appropriateness applies, of course, to many areas of life. Think about healthy eating habits. At stake is far more than merely knowing which foods are healthy and which are not. Healthy eating also involves eating on a regular basis, at the right times; it includes eating at a place which is clean, safe or dedicated to eating; and the people you are eating with makes a huge difference to whether the meal becomes just a meal in front of the TV, a feast, or a strengthening of family ties and friendship.

In similar fashion, following in the footsteps of Aristotle, the appropriate use of language is rooted in a wise sense of timing, place, purpose and relationships.<sup>5</sup> Thus, while making a general call for greater variety in metaphors for peace work and for less dominance by the ‘building’ metaphor, there clearly is no hard, timeless, inflexible, a-contextual rule to determine which metaphor is best. For example, as I become more familiar with ‘environment friendly’ and sustainable building practices through a growing involvement with an ecovillage project in South Africa, my negative

5. See Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* where he develops his theory of moral virtues – dealing amongst other things with how to deal appropriately with feelings of anger and fear, involving, basically, acquiring sensitivity to when, why, how, and with whom to be angry.

connotation with the 'building' metaphor is shifting.<sup>6</sup> I still prefer 'cultivation' but can see myself becoming more at home with the language of '*sustainable* peace building'.

The use of appropriate language therefore requires a peace worker to practice the *meta-skills* of sensitivity to time, place, purpose, particular relationships; to become an 'artist', painting word pictures that portray the complexity and dynamism of particular peace processes.

By calling attention to the metaphoric nature of a dominant expression, peace 'building', my hope is to breathe new life into what risks becoming a stale, almost dead comparison given its widespread use, especially by those in large bureaucracies such as the UN and the EU. In the process I highlighted the need for multiple metaphors, each with the potential to reveal and to distort; to give insight and to hide. As a gardener, builder, midwife, weaver, artist, long distance runner in working for enduring peace, one is often brought down to earth by the scale, complexity, fragility and elusiveness of peace. Humility lies at the heart of cultivating, growing, nurturing, fostering, building, constructing, facilitating lasting peace. A good way to keep the heartbeat of humility strong is to practice vigilance regarding the limits of the language peace workers use to convey what, how and why we do what we do.

This last reference to the 'why' of peace practice brings me to the most deeply rooted reason why I am drawn to the language of peace 'cultivation'.

### **Cultivating inclusive connections**

In trying to make sense of that unexpected cringe in response to the expression 'peacebuilding' I have stressed thus far the connection with my own particular nature-based peace practice during my time on the island of Ireland. I have suggested that 'cultivation' fits better than 'building' when one is describing transformational journeys into wild places aimed at bringing together people divided and hurt by violent conflict. We also saw how others seem to agree that the language of 'growing' and 'cultivation' helps to bring the deeper meanings of peacebuilding, of cultures of peace, to the fore. In other words, the thrust so far has been to give different metaphors, in appropriate ways, each their place in the sun.

However, by carefully unpeeling that cringe a bit further, a deeper and more radical layer of meaning is brought to light. For gradually I have come to see that taking survivors and former combatants from 'the Troubles' into the Wicklow Hills, the Scottish Highlands or a South African wilderness is not only a *means* to cultivate peace. We were not only *using* nature in various ways to help heal *interhuman* relationships. Cultivating less violent, more gentle connections *between humans and nature* became *in itself* an

---

6. See [www.sustainabilityinstitute.net/lynedochecovillage](http://www.sustainabilityinstitute.net/lynedochecovillage)



‘anchor root’ of sustainable peace (Little and Verwoerd 2013; Hamber, Little, Verwoerd 2017).<sup>7</sup>

Put differently, my unexpected discomfort with the language of peacebuilding arose in part from a shift in peace practice towards more nature-based work, but in this process the foundations of my understanding of what peacebuilding is about were also shaken to the core: I came to understand that transforming violent conflict between people needed to be *rooted* in a more holistic, integrated understanding of peace which combines social-economic-political, ecological/environmental and spiritual/intrapersonal dimensions into a ‘web’ of enduring connections (Capra 1996; Cilliers 1998). In the words of the *Earth Charter*: ‘...peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are part’.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, while we need to remain aware of the *limits* of whatever metaphor we use for peace, it is also important to work wisely with the *power* of language to frame and reveal underlying values and world views.

---

7. This 2017 ‘Cultivating Peace’ paper also highlights how my language and thinking around ‘peace building’ has been shaped by deep reflective interactions with the participants in the SPN.

8. Principle 16 (f) – see [www.earthcharter.org](http://www.earthcharter.org)

## References

Aristotle. 1980. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by David Ross. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Capra, Fritjof. 1996. *The Web of Life: A new scientific understanding of living systems*. Anchor Books.

Cilliers, Paul. 1998. *Complexity and Postmodernism*. London: Routledge.

Fisher, Simon. 2005. *Working with Conflict: Skills and Strategies for Action*. London: Zed Books.

Hamber, Brandon, Alistair Little, and Wilhelm Verwoerd. 2017. 'Cultivating Peace: An exploration of the role of nature-based activities in conflict transformation.' Paper presented at the *29th Annual Nobel Peace Prize Forum*, Augsburg University, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 15–16 September.

Lederach, John Paul. 1998. *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. United States Institute for Peace.

Little, Alistair and Wilhelm Verwoerd. 2013. *Journey through Conflict Trail Guide: Introduction*. Trafford Publishing.

Ramsbotham, Oliver, Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Miall. 2005. *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The prevention, management and transformation of deadly conflicts*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Schirch, Lisa. 2004. *The Little Book of Strategic Peacebuilding*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.

Verwoerd, Wilhelm. 2004. 'Troubled Scatterlings in a South African Wilderness.' *A Place for Peace: Glencree Centre for Reconciliation, 1974–2004*, 166–175. Dublin: The Liffey Press.

Zehr, Howard. 2005. *The Little Book of Contemplative Photography*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.

# SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENTS OF CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS



## Short Biographical Statements of Contributing Authors

**Leanne Abernethy** is a mother of three, currently residing in Bushmills Co. Antrim. She is employed in community development projects within rural loyalist areas, where there is a major under-representation of female voices within this sector.

Leanne is currently studying part time for a degree in Community Development at Ulster University.

**Ashle Bailey-Gilreath** is a PhD researcher at Belfast School of Art, Ulster University. Her research interests focus on collaborative and socially engaged photography and its usefulness for exploring the social landscape of cultural trauma, as well as topics on photographic authorship and ethical considerations in relation to collaborative photography.

**Dr Cathy Bollaert** holds a vision for building a society in which all can flourish. She is originally from South Africa but is currently living in Belfast where she works for Christian Aid, an international NGO committed to ending poverty worldwide. Cathy was awarded her PhD from the Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University. This forms the basis of her book *Reconciliation and Building a Sustainable Peace: Competing Worldviews in South Africa and Beyond*.

**Kate Catterall** is a designer and educator. Born in Belfast, N. Ireland, she studied at the Glasgow School of Art, Scotland and currently lives in Austin, Texas. Initially trained in the materials and methods of the industrial age, she started her career designing one-off products and environments for the luxury market in the U. K. She now teaches design at the University of Texas at Austin and positions her work in the interstitial space between critical and mainstream design practices. Her research explores the ontological potential and broader cultural impacts of design in contemporary society.

**Dr C. K. Martin Chung** is a political scientist and historian based in Hong Kong and Belfast. He holds a PhD from the University of Hong Kong (2014), and his major publications include *Repentance for the Holocaust: Lessons from Jewish Thought for Confronting the German Past* (Cornell University Press 2017) and *Reconciling with the Past: Resources and Obstacles in a Global Perspective* (Routledge paperback 2018, co-edited with Annika Frieberg). His articles have appeared in the *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* and *Jahrbuch für Politik und Geschichte*. Among other subjects, he teaches British politics and peace studies at Hong Kong Baptist University. He is also a graduate of Yad Vashem's International School for Holocaust Studies (2010) and Mindanao Peacebuilding Institute (2017).

**Geoffrey Corry** is a specialist in conflict resolution, facilitation and the mediation of work- place, family and community disputes. He facilitated over fifty Political Dialogue Work- shops held at Glencree (1994–2006) and in recent years the legacy large circle. He served as chair of Glencree Centre for Reconciliation (1982–87), the Mediators Institute Ireland and Facing Forward.

**Dr Gladys Ganiel** is a sociologist at Queen's University Belfast, specializing on religion, conflict transformation and religious change on the island of Ireland. She is author/co-author of six books and more than forty peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, including *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford University Press 2014), co-authored with Gerardo Marti, which won the 2015 Distinguished Book Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Her Master's module on 'Religion and Peacebuilding' won the 2019 Queen's Student Union's Module of the Year Award. She also is a past president of the European Sociological Association's Sociology of Religion Research Network.

**Sadie Gilker** is a Master's student in the Individualized Program at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Their thesis deals with performances of violence in the public spaces, blending urban planning, performance studies and history to complete this analysis.

**Dr Niall Gilmartin** is Lecturer in Sociology at Ulster University, Jordanstown. His research interests include conflict and peace studies; gender and armed conflict; forced displacement; transitional justice. He has published articles in several journals including *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *Capital & Class*, *International Journal of Transitional Justice* and *Irish Political Studies*. His book *Female Combatants After Armed Struggle: Lost In Transition?* was published by Routledge in 2019 as part of their Gender and Global Politics series. His forthcoming book *Northern Ireland: A Generation after the Good Friday Agreement*, co-authored with Colin Coulter, Katy Hayward and Peter Shirlow will be published in June 2021 by Manchester University Press.

**Samuel Guthrie** is a Masters of Public History student at Queen's University Belfast and a cataloguing officer on the 'Unlocking Our Sound Heritage Project'. His work has focused on the representation and misrepresentation of History in contested spaces.

**Dr Cheryl Lawther** is a Senior Lecturer in Law, School of Law, Queen's University Belfast. Her research interests are in the fields of transitional justice, truth recovery, victims, ex-combatants, reparations, emotions and conflict transformation. Her article 'Securing' the Past: Policing and the Contest over Truth in Northern Ireland', *British Journal of Criminology* 2010, 50, 3: 455–473 was awarded the Brian Williams Article Prize by the British Society of Criminology in July 2011. Her monograph *Truth, Denial and Transition: Northern Ireland and the Contested Past* was published by the Routledge Transitional Justice Series in 2014. Cheryl's most recent book *Research Handbook*

on Transitional Justice (co-edited with L. Moffett and D. Jacobs) was published by the Edward Elgar Research Handbooks in International Law series in 2017. Cheryl is currently leading and working on a number of UKRI and GCRF-DfE funded research projects – on victimhood, reparations and dark tourism post-conflict. Most recently, she has been awarded a Fulbright Irish Scholarship which she will take up in January 2020 at Berkeley School of Law.

**Dónall Mac Cathmhaoill** is a PhD candidate at Ulster University, examining modes of authorship in theatre for advocacy. As a writer-director he has wide experience working with communities in Ireland, the UK and beyond. He was a director at leading Irish theatre company Tinderbox, directing outreach and participation projects across Northern Ireland. Prior to this he was a producer at Soho Theatre, and has worked with major theatres including the National Theatre, London, 7:84 Theatre Company, Scotland, Jagriti Theatre in Bangalore, India and the Irish language company Aisling Ghéar.

**Dr Clare McAuley** is a Lecturer in the School of Education, Ulster University Coleraine. Her research interests include the role of education in promoting social cohesion; teaching History in contested societies; Citizenship education and teaching controversial and sensitive issues.

**Dr Jolene Mairs Dyer** is a Lecturer in Media Production at Ulster University and former Mental Health Social Worker and Therapist (Groupwork). She has research interests in collaborative documentary filmmaking/visual practice in post-conflict societies (particularly in post-agreement Northern Ireland) where the ownership of the material is shared between producer/director and the storyteller.

**Dr Luke Moffett** is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Law, Queen's University Belfast. His research examines the role of reparations in mediating and repairing the harm caused by conflict. He is currently Principal Investigator on the AHRC-funded 'Reparations, Responsibility and Victimhood in Transitional Societies' project. He has published a monograph *Justice for Victims before the International Criminal Court* (Routledge 2014) and an edited collection *Research Handbook on Transitional Justice* with Lawther and Jacobs (Elgar 2017). He has worked on a number of reparations projects including a pension for seriously injured victims in Northern Ireland and been an amicus curiae before the International Criminal Court.

**Emma Murphy** is a PhD candidate at University College Dublin and the recipient of an Irish Research Council laureate-affiliated scholarship. Her doctoral dissertation examines empirical manifestations of agonistic transitional justice in Northern Ireland, Colombia, Uganda, and Indonesia. She received her MPhil in International Relations and Politics at the University of Cambridge, where she completed a dissertation entitled 'Women's Renegotiation of Agency in Post-conflict Malawi and Colombia through an Agonistic Lens.'



**Dr Kevin De Ornellas** has lectured on British and Irish literature and drama at Ulster University since 2006. He is the author of a number of books, the most recent being *Focus on 'The Wesker Trilogy'* (Greenwich Exchange Press 2020). He is the co-editor of the two-volume *Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Literature* (2020). He has published over a dozen peer-reviewed, refereed essays in books and journals and has published dozens of book reviews, dozens of play reviews and hundreds of encyclopedia and reference articles. Since 2016 he has served on the Management Committee of the Riverside Theatre, Coleraine.

**Dr Heidi Riley** is Assistant Professor in International Relations in the School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin. She is also a member of the UCD GLOBUS research team that examines European contributions to global justice. Heidi's main research area is in gender and armed conflict, with a particular focus on the interaction between ideology and masculinity within non-state armed groups, and the implications of this for women during and after conflict. As a secondary research area she also works on issues of negotiated settlement, with a focus on women's participation in international peace mediation. Teaching areas include: International Relations: Theory and Practice, Conflict and Conflict Resolution, Gender Studies, and Qualitative Methods.

**Eimear Rosato**, originally from North Belfast, is a second year PhD student at Concordia University, Montréal Canada within the department of History and School of Irish Studies. Her research focuses on modern Irish history, memory studies, cultural and public history utilizing the methodological approaches of oral history.

**Joseph S. Robinson** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Geography, Maynooth University. His research focuses on memory studies, spatial legacies of violence, and transitional justice. He is the author of *Transitional Justice and the Politics of Inscription: Memory, Space, and Narrative in Northern Ireland* (2018, Routledge).

**Dr Stephen Roulston** Previously has been a teacher and an eLearning Consultant, is currently a lecturer in Education at Ulster University. Research interests include the impact of a divided society on the education system. Currently, he leads the UNESCO Centre's Transforming Education project aimed at stimulating debate about Northern Ireland's education system in advance of the proposed Independent Review of Education.

**Sammy Taggart** is a teacher educator in Technology and Design Education at Ulster University, Northern Ireland. His research interests focus on the use of educational technology to support learning and teaching, including the use of Virtual and Augmented Reality and 360 video, particularly within Initial Teacher Education.

**Dr Wilhelm Verwoerd** Senior Research Associate, Studies in Historical Trauma and Transformation, Stellenbosch University, South Africa; former joint coordinator of the Glencree Survivors and Former Combatants Programme and the Sustainable Peace Network project (2002-2011).

**“ON EITHER SIDE OF A POTENTIALLY  
VIOLENT CONFLICT, AN OPPORTUNITY  
EXISTS TO EXERCISE COMPASSION AND  
DIMINISH FEAR BASED ON RECOGNITION  
OF EACH OTHER’S HUMANITY.”**

**- ABERJHANI**

**info@glencree.ie**

**+353 1 2829711**

**www.glencree.ie**



**@GlencreeCentre**  
**#glencree4peace**

The Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation is a company limited by guarantee in the Republic of Ireland. Company No. 50088. Registered Charity No. CHY5943. Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA) No. 20009823.

**Funded by:**



**In association with:**



**NUI Galway**  
**OÉ Gaillimh**

